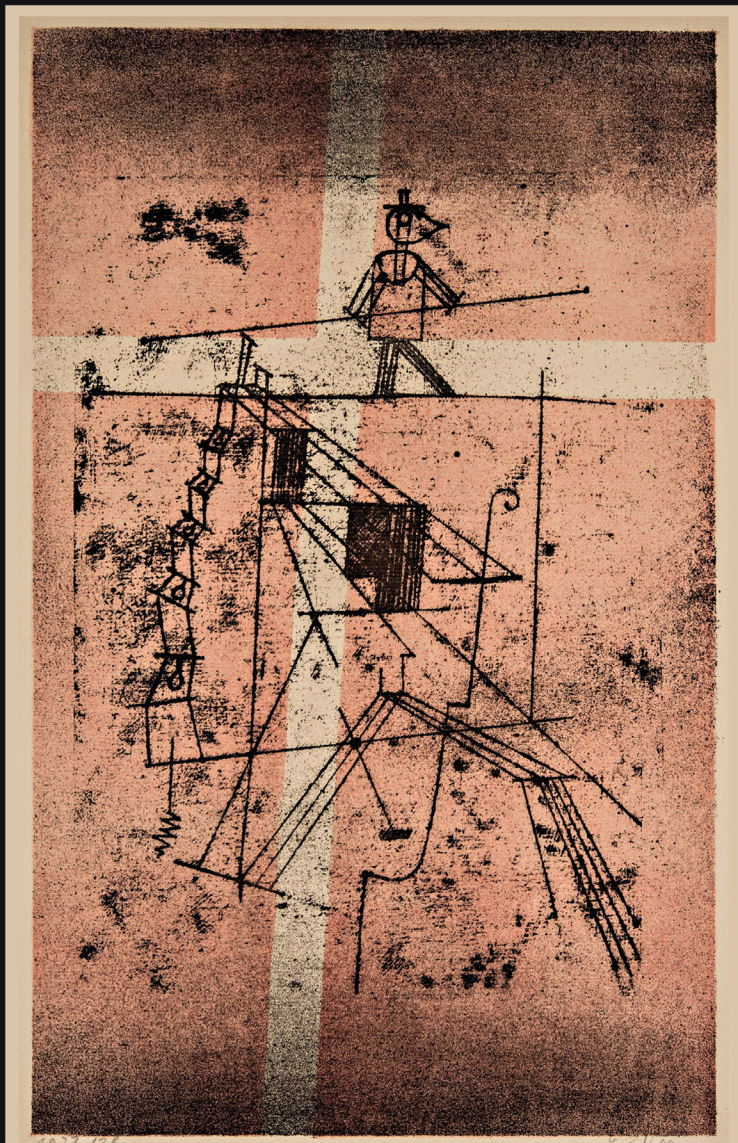


GERMAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Dilthey to Honneth



JULIAN YOUNG

ROUTLEDGE

German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century

The path taken by German philosophy in the twentieth century is one of the most exciting and controversial in the history of human thought, by turns radical and conservative and secular and religious. In this outstanding introduction, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Dilthey to Honneth*—the third and final volume in his trilogy—Julian Young examines the work of eight German philosophers and theologians of the period. He discusses their engagement with the deepest existential questions, their critique of the rationalization and mechanization of modernity, and their commitment to varying forms of liberalism, socialism, and democracy.

Young introduces and assesses the thought of the following figures:

- Wilhelm Dilthey: the need for ‘worldviews’, and the distinction between ‘explanation’ and ‘understanding’ as a bulwark against the reduction of human beings to scientific quanta
- Karl Jaspers: existentialism, the challenge of nihilism, and the turn to theology
- Edith Stein: the phenomenology of empathy, community versus society, and the turn to Catholicism
- Paul Tillich: philosophical theology and the ‘theonomous’ life
- Martin Buber: recovering the ‘thou’ in the face of modernity’s reduction of everything to an ‘it’; the kibbutz as the paradigm of a socialist community
- Hans Jonas: the mortal threat posed by the unknown consequences of modern technology and the ethics of responsibility for the planet
- Erich Fromm: the ‘art of loving’ as a bulwark against hard and soft totalitarianism; the replacement of capitalism by communitarian socialism
- Axel Honneth: contemporary Hegelianism and the ethics and politics of recognition; the nature of real freedom

Lucidly and engagingly written, *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Dilthey to Honneth* is essential reading for students of German philosophy, phenomenology, and theology and will also be of interest to students in related fields such as literature, political theory, and sociology.

German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Weber to Heidegger (2018) and *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss* (2020) are also available from Routledge.

Julian Young is William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Humanities Emeritus at Wake Forest University, USA, and Honorary Research Associate at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He is the author of sixteen books including *Schopenhauer* (Routledge, 2005); *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, which won the Association of American Publishers' 2010 PROSE award for philosophy; *The Philosophy of Tragedy: From Plato to Žižek* (2013); and *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life* (2nd edition 2014, Routledge).

German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century

Dilthey to Honneth

Julian Young

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Abbreviations

The bibliographical details of the works cited below are to be found in the bibliography at the end of this book. I have sometimes made minor alterations to the translations cited. Where I have made major alterations, I have provided the German original.

Buber

B	<i>The Philosophy of Martin Buber (ed. P. Schilpp)</i>
EG	<i>Eclipse of God</i>
IT	<i>I and Thou</i>
KM	<i>The Knowledge of Man</i>
LB	<i>The Letters of Martin Buber: A Life of Dialogue. (References are to letter rather than page numbers.)</i>
MM	<i>Between Man and Man</i>
N	<i>Where Community Happens: The Kibbutz and the Philosophy of Communalism (by Henry Near)</i>
PU	<i>Paths in Utopia</i>

Dilthey

DP	<i>Descriptive Psychology and Historical Understanding</i>
EP	<i>The Essence of Philosophy</i>
GS	<i>Gesammelte Schriften, 26 vols.</i>
PE	<i>Dilthey's Philosophy of Existence: Introduction to Weltanschauungen</i>
SW	<i>Selected Works, 6 vols.</i>

Fromm

AL	<i>The Art of Loving</i>
EF	<i>Escape from Freedom</i>
HB	<i>To Have or to Be?</i>

MFH	<i>Man for Himself</i>
SS	<i>The Sane Society</i>

Honneth

FR	<i>Freedom's Right</i>
R	<i>Reification</i>
SR	<i>The Struggle for Recognition</i>
Z	<i>Axel Honneth: A Critical Theory of the Social</i> (by Christopher Zurn)

Jaspers

FM	<i>The Future of Mankind</i>
J	<i>The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers</i> (ed. P. Schilpp)
P	<i>Philosophy</i> , 3 vols.
PW	<i>Psychologie der Weltanschauungen</i>
QG	<i>The Question of German Guilt</i>

Jonas

GMN	'Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism'
IJ	'An Interview with Professor Hans Jonas'
IR	<i>The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age</i>
M	<i>Memoirs</i>
MM	<i>Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz</i>
PE	<i>Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man</i>
PEC	'Philosophy at the End of the Century'
PL	<i>The Phenomenon of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology</i>

Stein

EW	<i>Essays on Women</i>
FEB	<i>Finite and Eternal Being</i>
IS	<i>An Investigation Concerning the State</i>
JF	<i>Life in a Jewish Family</i>
MH	'Martin Heidegger's Existential Philosophy'
PE	<i>On the Problem of Empathy</i>
PPH	<i>Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities</i>
SP	<i>Self-Portrait in Letters 1916–1942</i> . (References are to letter rather than page, numbers.)

Tillich

CTB	<i>The Courage to Be</i>
DF	<i>Dynamics of Faith</i>
ET	<i>The Essential Tillich</i> (ed. F. F. Church)
PT	<i>Paul Tillich: His Life and Thought</i> (by P. and M. Pauck)
ST	<i>Systematic Theology</i> , 3 vols.
TB	<i>Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries</i> (ed. M. Taylor)
TC	<i>Theology of Culture</i>
TT	<i>The Theology of Paul Tillich</i> (eds. C. Kegley and R. Bretall)

Other Abbreviations

Martin Heidegger

BT	<i>Being and Time</i> . (References are to the pagination of the 7th German edition given in the margins of the translation.)
GA	<i>Gesamtausgabe</i>
IM	<i>Introduction to Metaphysics</i>
PLT	<i>Poetry, Language, Thought</i>
PM	<i>Pathmarks</i>

Julian Young

GTC I	<i>German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Weber to Heidegger</i>
GTC II	<i>German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Lukács to Strauss</i>

Introduction

This is the third and final volume of *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. While many of the figures discussed in the earlier volumes are widely known, most of those who appear here are not. This, however, was not always the case. In the mid-twentieth century, Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, and Erich Fromm were public intellectuals whose global standing matched that of Gandhi, Sartre, and Bertrand Russell. Karl Jaspers provided the West German Republic with its moral direction as it emerged from the rubble and guilt of the Second World War, and thirty years later, Hans Jonas wrote the ‘bible’ of the German environmental movement. In part, this volume is a work of recovery, an attempt to reconnect with the once-influential insights of earlier generations.

The work that follows falls into two, unequal parts. The first five chapters concern philosophers—Dilthey, Jaspers, Stein, Tillich, and Buber—who are, in a broad sense, phenomenologists: close, first-person description of experience plays at least as important a role in their methodology as do argument and analysis. And, apart from Dilthey, they are all also philosophers of religion, a topic largely ignored in previous volumes. The remaining chapters concern philosophers—Jonas, Fromm, and Honneth—who, for want of a better word, may be regarded as critical theorists: in the main, they rely on argument and analysis rather than first-person description of experience.

All of my eight thinkers are, to differing degrees, critics of modernity. And all of them recognise what Max Weber calls the ‘rationalisation’ of modern life and thought (GTC I chap. 1) as the root of the ills of modernity: all of them identify the scientific-technological-industrial-capitalist complex as the source of the pathologies of modernity. Although they offer diverse remedies, they are constrained by a common commitment to some form of liberalism and (with the possible exception of Edith Stein) some form of democracy. Whereas all of the modernity-critics discussed in the previous volume (GTC II) favour some form of authoritarianism, this volume attends to the liberal and democratic tradition in modern German philosophy.

My first chapter concerns Wilhelm Dilthey, chronologically the oldest of the figures to be discussed. One of his two major concerns is the encroachment of the methodology of the natural sciences upon the study of humanity. Reacting against the threatened reduction of human beings to calculable scientific

quanta, he develops a distinction between the method of ‘explanation’ appropriate to the study of nature, and the method of ‘understanding’ appropriate to human beings. His second preoccupation is with the claim of philosophy (in particular, Hegel’s philosophy) to provide, like art and religion, a life-grounding ‘worldview’, while improving on art and religion in demonstrating its own worldview to be objectively true. Dilthey eventually concedes that no worldview can be established as objectively true, but the concession is reluctant since he also believes that possession of a settled worldview is essential to a mature life.

Chapter 2 concerns Karl Jaspers, the first modern existentialist. Agreeing with Dilthey both that possession of a worldview is essential to a grounded existence and that no worldview can be established as objectively true, he concludes that the acquisition of a worldview must consist in an act of fundamental choice, a Kierkegaardian ‘leap’ beyond reason to commitment. In his later thought, Jaspers turns to theology. Sensitive to, as Weber calls it, the ‘disenchantment’ produced by rationalisation, Jaspers argues that to overcome the ‘questionable’ character of human existence, we must re-enchant the world by readmitting the divine. Not, however, the divinity of traditional theology, the God of, as Heidegger calls it, ‘ontotheology’: in our scientific age, the idea of God as an extra-terrestrial ‘being’ can no longer be taken seriously. Rather, we must think of God as a power immanent in all natural phenomena, a power accessible to intuition but not to concepts. It is this power which is given ‘symbolic’ expression in both Schelling’s conception of nature as ‘will’ and Hegel’s conception of history as the biography of ‘world spirit’. To apprehend this ‘encompassing’ force is to live in a numinous world: ‘existence’ is transformed into ‘Existenz’.

Chapter 3 concerns the saint and martyr Edith Stein. Stein’s early, secular work is devoted to developing Dilthey’s notion of ‘understanding’, in particular, our understanding of other people, via a fine-grained phenomenological analysis of ‘empathy’. Writing at the time of the First World War, her other concern prior to her conversion to Catholicism is with the superiority of *Gemeinschaft* (community), which she sees as alive and well in Germany, to the mere *Gesellschaft* (society), the acquisitive, competitive individualism she sees as embodied in the capitalism of the Anglosphere. Subsequent to her conversion, Stein attempts to use the results of—in particular, Heidegger’s—phenomenology to re-argue the existence of God: not, however, Jasper’s newly conceived God, but rather God as the highest ‘being’, the God of Thomas Aquinas, of traditional ontotheology.

The question of how God is to be conceived is central to the work of the Protestant philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich (Chapter 4). Like Jaspers, Tillich rejects the God of ontotheology. To continue to insist, as does Stein’s traditional Catholicism, on God as a supernatural ‘being’, is to hasten the victory of atheism. And it is, moreover, contradictory. God, in his awesome mystery,

is supposed to be beyond conceptual comprehension. But to regard him as a being is to subject him to the categories of being, to 'substance', 'person', 'self', 'cause', and so on. Yet we cannot do without God, for only in 'him' can we overcome the 'anxiety' existentialist philosophy shows to be the hallmark of modern life. And so, like Jaspers, Tillich develops a post-ontotheological conception of God: God is a divine, teleological 'process' underlying natural phenomena, accessible to one who can read the 'signs'. To 'surrender' one's life to the divine venture—to become 'one with God'—is to live the 'theonomous' life of fearlessness and purpose. Since market capitalism is 'demonic', 'religious socialism' is the political meaning of such a life.

Although they were friends and political allies, Martin Buber (Chapter 5) did not accept Tillich's 'death of God' theology. Like Stein, although less emphatically, he retains the conception of God as the highest 'being'. Buber represents the rationalisation of modernity as the reduction of all relations to 'I-it' relations, the reduction of everything to an object or resource. To overcome the atomisation and isolation this produces, we need to recover the 'I-thou' relation, both to each other and to God, the 'eternal Thou'. Only with the restoration of the 'thou' can we live in community with each other and with God. Since it is the 'golem' of industrial capitalism that isolates us into lonely 'cogs in the machine', 'religious socialism' is the politics to which we should aspire. The early Israeli *kibbutzim* are paradigms of this form of socialism.

Although Hans Jonas (Chapter 6) would deny that he was a religious philosopher, like Jaspers and Tillich, he too belongs to the German metaphysical tradition which discovers a purposive force, a 'volition', as the origin and ground of all natural phenomena. The *telos* of this natural force is, he says, human subjectivity. Already intimated in the lowest amoeba, the 'horizon of selfhood' becomes increasingly visible as we ascend the hierarchy of species until, with humanity, we arrive at nature's 'ultimate goal'. It follows that to threaten the death of humanity either by reducing us to 'automata' in the industrial machine or by threatening the survival of the planetary biosphere on which we depend is the height of wrongdoing. But because we have no conception of the long-term consequences of present technological activity, putting the future of humanity at risk is precisely what we are doing. The fundamental principle of an ethics for the world of modern technology is thus the precautionary principle: nothing must be done that risks the future of either humanity or the planet. One consequence of this, Jonas believes, is that we must abandon consumer capitalism in favour of a new, and much more 'frugal', form of life.

Like the other figures in this volume, the philosopher-psychologist Erich Fromm (Chapter 7) is concerned with our reduction to 'cogs' in the economic machine: not merely cogs, but isolated and anxious cogs. We are anxious because the rise of capitalism in the fourteenth century destroyed the community and security we had enjoyed within the medieval order of estates. It is the quest to recover this lost security which explains the flight from freedom that has led

to the rise of totalitarianism: fascist totalitarianism in Germany and the soft totalitarianism of inauthentic conformism in America. But submerging oneself in the mass is not a genuine solution. Only the rediscovery of the ‘art of loving’ can restore us to community on a small scale, and only the replacement of free-market capitalism by ‘communitarian socialism’—a secular version of the ‘religious socialism’ of Buber and Tillich—can restore us to community on a large scale.

My final chapter is devoted to Axel Honneth, chronologically the youngest of the thinkers discussed in this book. As the successor to Habermas and the ‘second’ Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (GTC I chap. 3), Honneth is the central figure of the ‘third’ Frankfurt School. A Hegelian, and therefore less alienated from modernity than any of the figures discussed in the preceding chapters, Honneth nonetheless recognises neoliberal capitalism as a radical ‘misdevelopment’, a distressing falling short of the ‘moral economism’ that is capitalism’s hidden potential. Like Hegel, Honneth’s ultimate ambition is to find a synthesis between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Given the multi-cultural character of modernity, liberal democracy seems to be the only way in which, without coercion, we can live in peace as citizens of the same polity. If, however, we can learn to ‘recognise’ and ‘esteem’ our fellow citizens in spite of their cultural differences, Honneth believes, we can reintroduce into atomised modernity something of the communal ‘solidarity’ enjoyed by premodern societies.

A hidden ninth thinker in this book is Martin Heidegger (discussed at length in GTC I chaps. 6 and 9). Heidegger’s centrality to twentieth-century German philosophy manifests itself not only in his influence on Jaspers and Tillich, but also in the fact that, like many of the thinkers in the earlier volumes, Buber, Stein, and Jonas all feel compelled to engage in extensive Heidegger critiques. Attending to the criticisms of his contemporaries and near-contemporaries, I shall suggest, enlarges one’s understanding of Heidegger’s thought.

None of the chapters in this or the preceding volumes seeks to emulate the character of an encyclopaedia. While I attempt to present all my thinkers fairly and relatively completely, I engage with them critically, with some more critically than with others. Out of these varied responses, indications of my own religious, ethical, and political standpoints inevitably emerge: Fromm’s ‘communitarian socialism’ and Tillich and Buber’s ‘religious socialism’ are phrases I find an affinity with. While this may seem quixotic in the modern age, I would argue that what is problematic is neither religion, community, nor socialism, but rather the modern age.

Auckland
December 2021

I Wilhelm Dilthey

Explanation and understanding

Wilhelm Dilthey was born near Biebrich am Rhein in 1833, and attended gymnasium in nearby Wiesbaden. Though not a Christian (his disposition was towards pantheism [p. 11 below]), to please his parents, he enrolled to study theology at Heidelberg University. He was more interested, however, in the philosophy classes he took from Kuno Fischer (the author of a nine-volume history of modern philosophy that was the source of almost all of Nietzsche's knowledge of the subject). He continued his studies in Berlin where he came under the influence of students of the founder of modern hermeneutics, Friedrich Schleiermacher; one of his unfinished projects was an intellectual biography of Schleiermacher. In 1867, he obtained a position at the University of Basel and became friends with the great historian Jakob Burckhardt, in spite of Burckhardt's Schopenhauerian pessimism which horrified him. In 1869, he moved to a position in Kiel, just missing Nietzsche who arrived in Basel a few months after his departure. In 1882, he became professor of philosophy in Berlin, occupying the chair once occupied by Hegel. Having been born a decade before Nietzsche, he died a decade after him in 1911.

As Hannah Arendt observes, Dilthey was a comfortable member of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, devoid of sympathy for its 'great haters', Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche. He would have been appalled, she observes, by Nietzsche's contempt for the life of the scholar. Nonetheless, she allows, he does represent what was best in the 'spirit of his age'.¹ Politically Dilthey was a German communitarian (p. 13 below) who supported German unification. But while no revolutionary, he was also a supporter of reform, a believer in liberalism, democracy, human rights, and the *Rechtsstaat* (state founded on the rule of law). Both commitments find expression in a speech delivered on the occasion of his seventieth birthday: his greatest happiness, he says, is that he had lived to see 'the unification of our beloved German nation [1871] and the more liberal shaping of its regulations' (SW VI 163).

Dilthey had the habit of beginning large-scale projects and never finishing them. And so what confronts the reader is a large collection of fragments: unfinished books, unpublished drafts, long essays, and public lectures. Perhaps appropriately, given that one of his main topics is hermeneutics, understanding

Dilthey confronts one with a particularly difficult hermeneutical task. The somewhat unusual approach I shall take is to begin with his final writings and then work forwards to his earlier concerns.

Philosophy and worldviews

In the final years of his life, Dilthey began to reflect on the nature and value of his chosen profession, and in particular, on the relationship between philosophy on the one hand and ‘worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*)’ on the other. Like those before them, thinkers of the Enlightenment assumed that human nature, its emotional repertoire and modes of cognition, remained constant throughout history. Locke and Hume, for instance, speak only of *the* human mind, confident that their observations are as true of the fifth-century Greeks as of the eighteenth-century English. Nineteenth-century Germany, however, discovered ‘history’. Influenced by Hegel, historians such as Leopold von Ranke and Johann Gustav Droysen discovered ‘historical consciousness’, the fact that different historical epochs possess different, as Hegel called them, ‘shapes of consciousness’: different perspectives on life, different ways of conceptualising the real, different moralities, different fundamental moods, in a word, different ‘worldviews’. There is a temptation to say that if consciousness is always historically (and culturally) local, then so, too, is truth; to believe that all truth is confined or ‘relative’ to a particular historical epoch. But while postmodernism is generally happy to accept such a universal relativism, this is not how the nineteenth century saw matters. Whatever might be true of questions of value and of everyday commonsense, it assumed genuine ‘science’ to be unaffected by the historicity of consciousness and thus to be a—or rather the—source of, as Dilthey puts it, ‘universal validity’: ‘objective’, non-relative truth.

Dilthey sets out to resolve this tension between the universal truth of science and the historicity of consciousness. He frames the problem in terms of ‘worldviews’. Worldviews—for example, that of Christianity—claim to be universally true. But they are the products of historically local consciousness and so, it seems, their truth must be historically local too. This would not be a matter of concern to philosophy, says Dilthey, save for the fact that the great philosophies of the Western tradition have all been, at least in part, worldviews. So it seems that philosophy, too, is involved in a kind of fraudulence: in making claims to universal truth that cannot be justified. The project of Dilthey’s final years is to resolve this ‘antinomy’ (SW VI 169)—to show that while consciousness is indeed historical, the claim which the ‘science’² of philosophy makes to universal truth is genuinely warranted.

To approach his discussion, we need, first, to explore in greater detail his conception of a worldview, and, second, to determine what the relation between the philosophies of the past and worldviews is supposed to be.

What is a worldview?

The word *Weltanschauung* was coined by Kant (in Section 26 of the *Critique of Judgment*) who, in his discussion of the ‘mathematically sublime’, identifies a worldview as something infinite and as thus extending beyond ‘every standard of sense’. By the mid-nineteenth century, the word had come to mean a global outlook without rational pretensions. For Dilthey, the essential thing about worldviews is that they offer answers to the ‘riddle’ of life (SW VI 164, 168 et passim), to the fact that we are born (‘thrown’, as Heidegger puts it) into a problematic situation: a will to permanence combined with the certainty of death, a will to harmony combined with a world of conflict. What then should we do about our difficult situation? How should we live, if indeed we should continue to live at all? Worldviews provide answers.

Worldviews, says Dilthey, all have the same triadic structure: they provide an account of the ultimately real, an evaluative appraisal of life, and finally a prescription of ideals and goals. This structure corresponds to the three principal capacities of the mind: cognition, feeling, and volition (PE 25–7; EP 64), the cognitive, affective, and conative. Together, the three interconnected elements of a worldview provide a reading or interpretation of life in general, and of one’s own life in particular, that provides us with ‘sense and meaning’ (EP 64).

Worldviews, says Dilthey, can be broadly classified as either optimistic or pessimistic. Every worldview has a distinct ‘attitude’ or mood (EP 64), a fundamental mood that generates both evaluation and volition. Thus, to take (at least Schopenhauer’s version of) the Buddha’s worldview (EP 70), according to its cognitive component, life is craving and hence suffering, and hence worthless, from which it follows that we should have as little to do with it as possible and hope that death comes sooner rather than later. Notice that within worldviews, there is no separation between fact and value. The mood expressed by Buddhism’s negative evaluation of life, says Dilthey, is as much the ground as the product of its perception of life: it generates a cognitive bias that makes some things salient while obscuring others. And, of course, the volitional element in Buddhism is already contained in its evaluative, axiological element. For this reason, Dilthey describes the three components of worldviews as ‘equi-original’.³

By the time Dilthey came to write about them, the fashion for talking about worldviews had begun to wane and a counter-reaction had set in, a reaction that culminated in Husserl’s savage attack on ‘worldview philosophy’ in his ‘Philosophy as a Rigorous Science’ of 1911.⁴ Dilthey, however, likely influenced by Schopenhauer’s account of our ‘metaphysical need’ (the idea of life as a ‘riddle’ [p. 7 above] probably comes from Schopenhauer), takes the possession of a worldview to be a prerequisite of a properly flourishing life. Kant had viewed the idea of ‘world as a totality’ as an ‘idea of reason’ and the drive to a synoptic vision as intrinsic to the faculty of reason. But for Dilthey, it is not the intellect but rather ‘life’ that generates worldviews: ‘every true worldview’,

he writes, 'is an intuition which emerges from standing-in-the-middle-of-life' (GS VIII 99).

Artists and philosophers are, he says, exceptional in that they 'raise [worldviews] to consciousness' (EP 40). But healthy, everyday being-in-the-world requires at least an inarticulate 'view' of the totality. Why should this be so? One reason is that, in modern life, we are bombarded with contradictory worldviews that are locked into a struggle for existence, that is, for converts. The 'naïve consciousness' that has not determined which one to adopt will thus be indecisive in the face of the swirling flux of opinion (EP 40, PE 28). But why cannot we just ignore them all, why do we need to adopt *any* worldview? On account, says Dilthey, of an inner flux, the flux of feeling and desire produced by our continual exposure to environmental stimuli. What the combination of 'knowledge of the world, evaluation of life, and principles of action' within a worldview does is to provide the 'inner unification of personality in its various activities' (EP 64), a unification which satisfies 'the will within us that aims at stability' (PE 24), abhors becoming the plaything of stimuli of the moment. As Goethe observes, growing up (at least in modern times) is typically a testing of different worldviews. There is a kind of Darwinian struggle within the developing mind until, with maturity, one settles on the one that 'lead[s] on to more useful goals of life' (PE 28). The settled worldview of the mature individual does not, however, become rigid: subtle refinements continue in accordance with one's experience of life (EP 39–40). This acquiring and refining of one's own worldview, clearly, is Dilthey's account of *Bildung*, of that 'character building' (EP 67) that was the *raison d'être* of nineteenth-century German education.

The 'essence' of philosophy

How does philosophy come into the discussion of worldviews? What is the relation between philosophy and worldviews? What indeed *is* philosophy, what is its 'essence'?

Borrowing Hegel's classification of the main phases of Western civilisation, Dilthey identifies art ('poetry'), religion, and philosophy (or 'metaphysics') as the media in which worldviews come to expression. Like Hegel, he suggests that art and religion are embryonic forms of philosophy—of philosophy, at least, according to its traditional conception. They have, that is, a natural tendency to grow into philosophy. With respect to religion, this is an historical fact: the paradoxes of religious belief (which Dilthey regards as actually insoluble) were what generated the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages (EP 50). Something similar is true with respect to poetry: the pre-Socratic poet-philosophers were the precursors of Greek philosophy proper (EP 59), Schiller expressed the poetic impulse that gave rise to German idealism (PE 66).

What, then, does metaphysics add to poetry and religion? In a word—one of Dilthey's favourite words—'system': 'systematic form' is, he says, the 'highest

function' of philosophy (SW VI 164, 168). By 'system', Dilthey means something that mimics the methodological rigour of a natural science: a hierarchically organised structure of propositions whose terms are all clearly defined and for whose fundamental propositions there is evidence so compelling as to allow them to make a legitimate claim to 'universally valid truth'. The principal difference between philosophy on the one hand and poetry and religion on the other is that whereas philosophy offers proof, poetry and religion rely on 'persuasion'. In this, they are 'akin to the Sophists whom Plato banished so sternly from the realm of philosophy'. It is Nietzsche's hostility to system (famously, he called the 'will to system' a 'lack of integrity') that in Dilthey's mind, categorises him as a 'writer' rather than philosopher, a writer who has 'broken every bond with philosophy as science' (EP 31). (The fact that Nietzsche turned his back on the life of a professor and that his stellar light cast Dilthey into the shade might have something to do with Dilthey's hostility towards his near contemporary.)

The difference, then, between philosophy, on the one hand, and art and religion, on the other, is, in a word, the difference between 'knowledge in its strictest form as science' and non-science which might be referred to as 'wisdom' (EP 9). Hence, as Husserl puts Dilthey's point, as traditionally conceived, philosophy claims to combine two things: worldviews and science.⁵ Husserl is sharply critical of Dilthey because he believes that they cannot be combined. What he fails to realise, however, as we are about to see, is that this is Dilthey's final position too.

The problem of relativism

Religious worldviews (monotheistic ones, at least) claim 'universal validity'—claim to be the one and only true religion. Literary worldviews on the other hand, suggests Dilthey, 'relax' the claim to universal validity, giving expression merely to one particular life-experience (EP 31). There is, Dilthey is suggesting, a tacit element of autobiography in the literary expression of worldviews. Thomas Hardy presents us with lowering skies and tragic fates, but accompanies his portrait of rural Wessex with an implicit 'This is my experience of life; perhaps it is yours, too—though perhaps not'. But when such a worldview is presented as 'metaphysics' (by, for instance, Schopenhauer) per force, it claims to be universally valid: to be the one and only correct account of the fundamental nature of the world and of the correct manner of living within it. Purporting to be 'science', it claims to be an account of things which, as rational beings, we must accept. Here, however, we confront the (for Kant, 'scandalous') fact that the history of philosophy records, not a steady march towards universally agreed truth as in the natural sciences, but rather an 'anarchy or philosophical systems' (PE 17), a cacophony of incommensurable metaphysical systems clamouring for our allegiance.

How are we to explain this anarchy? The answer is clear. Metaphysics is the presentation of a worldview in scientific clothing. But

every worldview is historically conditioned, hence limited, hence [unlike the universal validity of genuine science] relative. A horrendous anarchy of thought seems to follow from this.

(SW VI 167)

‘Historically conditioned’ is an abbreviation for all sorts of conditioning to which worldviews are subject. It is not only differences in historical epoch that determine different worldviews but also differences in climate, race, and nationality, as well as differences in individual life-experience and temperament (PE 27–8). That worldviews should be so conditioned is a product of their essentially practical nature: since they are practical—‘technical’, Dilthey sometimes says (EP 67)—since they are tools for coping with life, and since the conditions of life vary from locale to locale and from individual to individual, so do worldviews. As philosophy, worldviews are all *Lebensphilosophie*, ‘philosophy of [and for] life’ (EP 13). (Pierre Hadot points out that during the Hellenistic period, philosophies were explicitly considered to be tools for living. They were offered as ‘spiritual exercises’ for coping with life, so while Stoicism might be considered the ‘right’ philosophy for one kind of individual, Cynicism, Scepticism, or Epicureanism might be ‘right’ for others.)⁶

* * *

‘Character’ (PE 44), individual temperament, is particularly important in accounting for what Dilthey regards as the three broad kinds of metaphysical systems that have dominated the history of philosophy: ‘naturalism’, ‘objective idealism’, and ‘subjective idealism’ or the ‘idealism of freedom’, a triad corresponding to the three mental faculties, the cognitive, affective, and conative. Naturalism, he says, is likely to be adopted by someone in whom the perceptual faculty is dominant, subjective idealism by someone in whom volition is dominant, and objective idealism by someone in whom the affects are dominant.

Naturalism, the view that ‘nothing exists outside nature’ (PE 53), is a worldview that runs from Democritus via Hobbes to modern positivism. It is the product of ‘sensuous man’, of one who, like Epicurus, wishes to enjoy a life of serene hedonism. It is a reaction against the gloom of the gods and the asceticism of priests. Its battle cry, ‘emancipation of the flesh’, is a cry that, even in the god-fearing Middle Ages, resounds in the songs of the minstrels (PE 53). Naturalism is thus the product of the wish: the sensualist wishes the gods to be dead and so affirms that they are. It gives epistemic priority to the cognitive faculty, but cognition is reduced to sensation because, conveniently, sensation reveals nothing that is not natural. According to the metaphysics

of naturalism, nothing exists but matter in deterministic, mechanical motion. With naturalism, 'nature has lost its soul' (PE 53–7).

The 'idealism of freedom' is similarly a matter of the wish being father to the metaphysics. Socrates and Plato, the Church fathers, Rousseau, Kant, and Fichte all share a similar cast of mind, a polemical antagonism towards naturalism: all of them reject determinism and affirm the 'spontaneity' (freedom) of human action that is presupposed by moral responsibility. And, against the pantheists, they insist that the creator God stands outside the causal world. This worldview is the product of 'heroic man', a personality that gives epistemic priority to the volitional faculty. While Schiller is its poet, Carlyle is its prophet and historian (PE 61–6).

'Objective idealism'—pantheism or panentheism—is a style of metaphysics that, like naturalism and subjective idealism, appears in all historical periods. It runs from Heraclitus via Spinoza and Hegel to Schelling (and, one might add, to the later Heidegger). Opposed to Christian transcendentalism, it views the world as the 'unfolding of God' in time. Objective idealism gives feeling epistemic precedence over both cognition and volition. It is the product of a spirit given to the contemplative rather than active life, to a universal sympathy that creates a sense of union with the divine coherence of things. Dissonances are merely steps to higher things. Mostly, objective idealists accept causal determinism (or at least, like Schelling, treat freedom as the sublime identification with the causal totality). Dilthey's sympathetic treatment of objective idealism makes clear that this is his own worldview (PE 67–74).

Dilthey's solution to the problem of relativism

Historically speaking, we have seen, philosophers put forward worldviews which claim to be universal 'scientific' truth. But all these claims are fatally compromised by 'historical consciousness', by the irretrievably conditioned character of all worldviews. But Dilthey is himself a philosopher and favours a particular worldview. Is he then a relativist? Does he hold that, in reality, there are no universal truths and, in particular, that universal truth is no more the product of philosophy than it is of art or religion? Does he hold that philosophy is really nothing more than disguised poetry? To put the question another way, is Dilthey really, as both Husserl and Heidegger claim, nothing more than 'a relativistic "philosopher of life"'?⁷

As Frederik Beiser points out, Dilthey vehemently denied that he was a relativist and 'responded with disbelief when Husserl insinuated [in 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science'] that Dilthey's historicism led to scepticism and relativism'.⁸ He made various attempts to have his cake and eat it, to show that while all thought is indeed 'historically conditioned', in principle, there can still be universal philosophical truths. One such attempt is the suggestion that different philosophical worldviews can be seen as 'hypotheses', which in the long run will approach universal validity (PE 43, 47) on the model of progress in natural

science. But this is inconsistent with his rejection of ‘philosophy of history’, Hegel’s notion that history is driven forward by an inexorably progressive logic (SW I 87–93), and, more importantly, with his account of the ‘technical’, pragmatic nature of worldviews. Given that the point of a worldview is to enable a particular kind of personality to cope with life in a particular time and place, and given, too, the implausibility of arranging forms of human life into a progressive series, the analogy with natural science cannot be maintained.

Another attempt to combine historicism with absolute truth is to say that each of the three kinds of philosophical worldviews

expresses, within the bounds of our thought, one side of the universe. Each worldview is to that extent true; but each is one-sided. It is impossible for us to see these sides simultaneously. We have access to the pure light of truth only in variously refracted rays.

(SW VI 168)

This, from a speech celebrating Dilthey’s seventieth birthday, is suggestive rather than precise. Beiser believes that the passage fails in its objective, for while intended to rebut relativism, it really accepts it: philosophical claims are true-within-a-perspective but not true absolutely.⁹ Another possible reading is to view the passage as an intimation of what (following Hubert Dreyfus) I have called ‘plural realism’ (GTC I 110), the view that different perspectives on the real disclose different aspects of it and therefore different—absolute—truths about it. This, however, seems an improbable reading since, as Dilthey makes clear, the three types of worldviews are polemical *contradictions* of each other. While ‘That is water’ and ‘That is H₂O’ can be regarded as belonging to different perspectives on the real and as both revealing (absolute) truths about it, they can be so regarded only if we can establish their *compatibility*—which in this case, we can do by elucidation of the meaning of ‘water’ in terms of sensory predicates such as ‘feels wet’ ‘looks transparent’, and so on. But the naturalist’s ‘Every event is predetermined by a physical cause’ and the subjective idealist’s ‘Human agents are ‘spontaneous’ (uncaused) causes’ not only contradict each other but are intended to do so.

Fairly clearly, however, the attempt to combine truth and historicism is not Dilthey’s most cogent, nor, I think, his most considered response to the tension between the two. His most considered, albeit perhaps somewhat reluctant, response, is, rather, the rejection of ‘metaphysics’, of philosophy’s traditional ‘essence’. Since Kant, he says, we have known that the problem of developing a metaphysics that on the one hand responds to the ‘riddle’ of life while on the other, meeting the standards of science is ‘insoluble’, from which it follows that, as Kant says, ‘metaphysics is impossible’ (EP 64). We are thus forced to make a choice: philosophy must either stick to the task of providing a worldview to comfort and guide human beings in the face of life’s riddle and abandon its pretensions to science, or it must insist that science belongs to its

inalienable ‘essence’ and give up the claim to offer a riddle-solving worldview. Philosophy must choose between its status as science and being ‘philosophy of life’ which, like the *Lebensphilosophie* of the Hellenistic period, takes the claim to universal validity ‘more indulgently’ than does science (EP 18). At his most cogent, Dilthey’s choice is clear: he opts for science.¹⁰ His ‘last word’ on worldviews is, he says, ‘not the relativity of each [though they are indeed relative] but the sovereignty of the mind over against every single one of them’ (EP 66).

This is not only Dilthey’s most cogent response to the problem of the relativism of worldviews but also, I believe, his most authentic response—even if he fumbles about somewhat before finding it. What suggests this to be the case is the foundational status he gives to Raphael’s ‘School of Athens’ (below) in his ‘Dream’ speech of 1903 on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. Paralleling the wonderful unification of ‘our beloved German nation’ and the ‘more liberal shaping of its regulation of life’ (p. 5 above) is, he says, ‘the harmonious spirit of the divine Raphael tam[ing] the strife of systems’ (SW VI 165). Despite the visible clash between Plato’s subjective idealism and Aristotle’s naturalism, the pair are displayed as united in the harmonious brotherhood of philosophical dialectic—just as, in the liberal-democratic thought to which Dilthey subscribes, people of radically different, even contradictory, opinions can be bound together by loyalty to the social order that allows the peaceful coexistence of their different opinions.



‘The School of Athens’ by Raphael.

The new 'essence' of philosophy

Philosophy, then, must rise above the battle, the 'anarchy' of competing worldviews. Although, qua human being, one needs a worldview, qua philosopher, one must endorse no worldview at all. But what then is the point of philosophy? If it abandons the 'riddle', what task remains? What, for Dilthey, really is the 'essence' of philosophy; what, that is, is the essence of 'philosophy as [rigorous] science' (p. 11 above)? At the most general level, philosophy is, he says, 'the reflection of the mind on itself', an aspect of philosophy that has always persisted 'alongside the [futile] striving for a universally valid worldview' (EP 68). There are two aspects to such reflection. The first is the mind's reflection on the logical and epistemological foundations of the natural sciences: philosophy clarifies the methods of the particular sciences, attends to the 'presuppositions, goals, and limits of natural scientific knowledge'. Of all 'the one-sided definitions of philosophy, there is none which would be so self-evident as that it is the theory of [natural-scientific] theories' (EP 69), the 'science of sciences'.¹¹ The reason this definition is 'one-sided' is that the mind's reflection on itself includes not only its reflections on its method of studying nature but also on its method of studying humanity itself. Alongside the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), there are also the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) (EP 68). And as we are about to see, Dilthey believes that there is a proper methodology for the human sciences and that it is quite different from that which is proper to the natural sciences. In his full conception, then, philosophy is the science of *all* the sciences, the human as well as the natural sciences.

Historicism and existentialism

Scholars often attribute to Dilthey the thesis that '*all* thought is historical'. And sometimes he can be read in that way. But, as we have now seen, this is not his considered view. In the end, as the good Kantian that he is, he saves the universal validity of philosophical truth by divorcing philosophy from the relativity of worldviews. The 'philosophical spirit' is present, he writes in 1908, whenever 'free philosophical thinking' attends to 'what is odd or obscure in man' and 'for every valid thing seeks the ground of its validity' (EP 72–3). Freed of its commitment to worldviews and their inevitable relativity, philosophy is 'science' and shares in the universal validity of scientific truth: as the theory of theories, 'as theory of knowledge, it is science' (EP 68).

Where, however, does this leave worldviews, those essential ingredients in human flourishing? If philosophy as rigorous science abandons the attempt to provide us with one, where should we look? While knowledge of one's circumstances and one's temperament may make some worldviews more appropriate than others, ultimately, says Herbert Hodges in his pioneering 1944 study of Dilthey, it is a matter of 'choice', of free commitment. Thus, he says, Dilthey's 'philosophy of philosophy' leads, in the end, to existentialism, to the idea of an

act of ungrounded commitment as the foundation of one's life-project. In particular, says Hodges, it leads to the existentialism of Karl Jaspers.¹² Leo Strauss makes the same point: existentialism, he says, is the reaction of 'serious men' to the relativism produced by nineteenth-century historicism (GTC II 204). Hodges is, I believe, correct. In Chapter 2, I shall examine the way in which Jaspers' existentialism grows out of Dilthey's discussion of worldviews.

Dilthey's philosophical task

Dilthey, then, agrees with Kant that philosophy should be the science of sciences, a second-order science, a 'critique', that puts the first-order sciences on a firm, if possibly restricted, foundation. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant sets out to execute such a programme. But, says Dilthey, there is a lacuna in the execution because Kant attends exclusively to the natural sciences and says nothing at all about the human sciences. Dilthey's task, as he sees it, is to remove this lacuna by providing a 'critique of historical reason, i.e., a critique of the capacity of man to know himself and the society and history which he has produced' (SW I 165). Notice that 'history' as Dilthey uses the term, embraces all aspects of cultural life, so that 'historical sciences' embraces all of the human sciences.

There are two presuppositions implicit in this project. The first is that the human sciences really are sciences, that *Geisteswissenschaften* really should be translated as 'human sciences' rather than, as in older translations, 'human studies': that they possess, or can possess, a proper methodology, a 'systematic', 'rule-governed' procedure that is a reliable path to 'objective', 'universally valid', demonstrable truth. The second is that Kant really did miss out on something, that his 'critique' of the natural sciences cannot be applied to all sciences. A thesis subscribed to by positivists, and by Kant himself, is the 'unity of the sciences': all of the sciences form a single whole, which is unified in that (a) the fundamental and less fundamental sciences form a hierarchy and (b) a single scientific method can and should be deployed by all of them. The thesis of the unity of the sciences is what Dilthey denies: although the human sciences are indeed sciences, their methodology is distinct from that of the natural sciences. He sums up this claim in a pregnant sentence: 'Nature we explain, psychic life we understand' (SW II 119). The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to understanding this sentence, understanding the method of *Erklären* that is proper to the natural sciences and the method of *Verstehen* that is proper to the human sciences.

What, according to Dilthey, count as human sciences? They include history, economics, jurisprudence, political theory, aesthetics, psychology, and philosophy itself (GS 7 79). They are the reflexive sciences in which humanity turns from studying non-human nature to studying itself. Of course, some of the natural sciences also study humanity—biology and physiology, for instance. Thus a more precise account of what makes the human sciences *human* sciences is

that they study the 'spiritual (*geistig*)' or 'psychic (*seelisch*)' aspect of human beings. What, in other words, makes the *Geisteswissenschaften* human sciences is the study of *Geist*, 'spirit' or 'mind'. This suggests to Dilthey that, in some sense, psychology (the study of the 'psyche') is foundational to the human sciences, that all the other human sciences are special applications of psychology: that economics deals with the psychology of economic life, history with the psychology of historical actors, literary theory with the psychology of authors and readers, and so on (SW II 121–2). If, then, we can arrive at a proper account of scientific psychology, Dilthey believes, we will have completed the task of 'founding' the human sciences.

The inadequacy of explanatory psychology

A difference between the knowledge we have of ourselves and of non-human nature is that whereas we have only one mode of access to non-human nature, external sense perception, to ourselves we have two: external sense perception and introspection. Whereas we have only third-person access to non-human nature, we have both third- and first-person access to ourselves. The fundamental question at issue between Dilthey and the 'positivist' view of psychology and of the human sciences in general that he opposes is whether this difference in experiential access is scientifically relevant.

Positivism affirms, to repeat, the unity of the sciences. There is only one genuinely scientific method, and that is the method that has accounted for the extraordinary progress of natural science since the seventeenth century. It has two aspects. The first is the exclusion of all first-person, introspective reports from the realm of evidential observation. Since they are vague and subjectively variable, introspective reports fail the requirement that only interpersonally 'repeatable' observations should be allowed evidential status. As our access to non-human nature is confined to the third person, so, too, should be the scientific treatment of human nature. The second aspect of the method is a particular mode of reasoning known variously as the 'covering law', 'hypothetico-deductive', or 'deductive-nomological' method. According to this model, an event B is 'explained'—or if in the future, 'predicted'—if and only if it is the deductive consequence of a causal law of the form 'whenever A-type events occur B-type events follow' together with the statement that an A-type event has occurred. The crucial concept here is 'causal law'. In the first instance, a law is the statement of a regularity that is highly confirmed, is, that is, the inductive result of a large number of observations. Some regularities, of course, are mere regularities. Night regularly follows day but is not caused by it. A causal hypothesis is only elevated to the status of a law when science is able to discriminate between it and mere, non-causal, regularities. It does this by discovering a mechanism which explains *why* A-type events must be followed by B-type events.

If the thesis of the unity of the sciences is true, it follows that the covering law method is the proper method for a scientific psychology. This is the view of the protagonists of what Dilthey calls 'explanatory psychology (*erklärende Psychologie*)', a term Dilthey applies to the experimental psychology that was just beginning to become a recognised science during his lifetime. Its roots, he says, go back to Spinoza and Hobbes and its mode of thinking extends via Locke and Hume to J. S. Mill.

One version of experimental psychology is behaviourism, the assumption that mental phenomena have no scientific use and should be ignored by psychology, which should confine itself to codifying regularities between environmental stimuli and behavioural responses. This, however, is not what Dilthey means by explanatory psychology. The psychology he is talking about reproduces the full methodology of natural science and postulates explanatory mechanisms in the minds of its subjects to explain the regularities in their stimulus-response behaviour. Since, however, the first-person point of view is excluded by explanatory science, these entities are postulated not on the basis of introspection, but are rather 'hypothesised' or 'constructed' (SW II 127) in the same third-person way as are explanatory mechanisms in non-human nature. There is, however, notes Dilthey, wide disagreement as to the character of these mechanisms: some theorists postulate four mental faculties, sensation, representation, feeling, and volition; others prefer three, absorbing volition into feeling; and there are other variations on offer too.

Dilthey has a number of objections to explanatory psychology. The first is to this plethora of hypothetical accounts of the engineering of the mind: 'hypotheses everywhere, only hypotheses' he complains (SW II 118). Part of this complaint—the alleged absurdity of *hypothesising* the nature of the human mind when we actually have direct, first-person knowledge of it—I shall postpone until I turn to Dilthey's own alternative psychology. The other part is the complaint that explanatory psychologists have no way out of the 'haze of hypotheses' since 'the possibility of testing them against the facts of consciousness is nowhere in sight' (*ibid.*)—nowhere in sight on account of their denying themselves access to first-person knowledge of the mind. This objection seems clearly mistaken: as with the natural sciences, the testing of the explanatory constructs of experimental psychology will consist in the reliability or otherwise of the behavioural predictions their theories produce.

A second objection is to the shallowness of explanatory psychology. The deepest psychologists are the great poets, Shakespeare and others who are gifted with penetrating insight into human nature (SW II 127–8). What we want from scientific psychology, claims Dilthey, is something that reaches the same depth. But explanatory psychology only deals with human beings at the shallowest level (SW II 131). The idea, for example (my example), of turning to explanatory psychology to answer the question that has occupied literary critics for four hundred years, Why did Hamlet hesitate?, is laughable.

Psychoanalysis, of course, has a great deal to say on the subject: but psychoanalysis is not explanatory psychology but rather a version of the first-person, 'descriptive' or 'contentful' psychology that Dilthey favours (albeit not a version of which he approves [p. 19 below]).

Dilthey's third objection joins forces with the patronising attitude that natural scientists sometimes take towards the human sciences. Explanatory psychology, he observes, consists in 'the conviction it can derive a comprehensive and transparent cognition of psychic phenomena from a limited number of univocally determined elements' (SW II 116). The reason the natural sciences can make reliable and exceptionless predictions is that they are able to reduce nature to fundamental elements—'atoms' in one form or another—which, because they are exactly alike in their properties and behaviour and never change over time, provide science with the constants for precise, 'universally valid' mathematical calculation. Experimental psychology postulates corresponding psychic elements, to be sure, its sensations, feelings, volitions, and so on, but in reality these entities are mythical. This is because psychic phenomena are essentially holistic: their character is dependent on the historically, culturally, and individually variable contextual totality in which they are located. Psychic phenomena are essentially 'historical'. There are no psychic 'atoms', and thus the idea of matching the predictive reliability of the natural sciences in the realm of human behaviour is a pipe dream.

I shall be arguing, later, that Dilthey's holism is true—with respect to mental phenomena as they present themselves to first-person introspection. The mental structures postulated by explanatory psychology, however, are no more claimed to be objects of introspection than are the chemical structures of non-human things. The holistic and hence variable nature of objects of introspection is therefore irrelevant to explanatory psychology's presupposition that there are, in principle at least, mental 'atoms'. Dilthey's assertion that *all* mental phenomena are historical and holistic is a mere assertion.

Descriptive psychology

Given that the proper method of psychology is to be the method of the human sciences in general, and given the alleged inadequacy of explanatory psychology, it follows, Dilthey believes, that we need a new approach to psychology and to the foundations of the human sciences, a new account of psychology's proper method. And since, he believes, the inadequacy of explanatory psychology is the inadequacy of the third-person point of view, the only alternative is to turn to the first person. The most fundamental feature of this new form of the discipline, which Dilthey calls 'descriptive psychology', is that while explanatory psychology merely 'hypothesises' mental entities and structures, descriptive psychology 'describes' them as they are 'given' to us in first-person experience: 'by descriptive psychology I understand a science that ... can be

verified unequivocally in inner perception' (SW II 127), in, more specifically, 'lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*)' (SW I 246–7).

In that it bases itself on first-person experience, descriptive psychology is continuous with the way we understand each other in daily life. The 'understanding' it provides belongs to 'the domain of all who are actively involved in human affairs ... and differs from explanation by participating in life, and is possible only on the basis of life' (SW I 439). I know that the reason you are putting a sweater on is that you feel cold because that is what I do when I feel cold. This, of course, is a trivial mode of understanding someone. The masters of the understanding that penetrates to the depths of the human psyche are, to repeat, the poets and writers: in the works not only of Shakespeare but also of Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, St. Augustine, Montaigne, Tolstoy, Lightenberg, and Nietzsche (SW II 127–8, EP 31), 'one finds an understanding of human beings in the fullness of their actuality', which 'outstrips every explanatory psychology'. The poets' understanding of human nature is, however, entirely 'intuitive'. Though the saying that there is more psychology in *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth* than in all the psychology textbooks is in a sense correct, if by 'psychology' we mean *scientific* psychology, there is no psychology at all in Shakespeare. What scientific descriptive psychology seeks to do is to capture the intuitive knowledge of the poets in a 'universally valid system'. Since it does this through 'generalisations and abstractions', through, as it were, a forensic approach to the knowledge of the poets, 'descriptive' psychology is also 'analytic' psychology (SW II 128).

Dilthey makes the assumption—he calls it 'the principle of phenomenology'—that 'whatever is there for us ... is subject to the condition of being given in consciousness' (SW I 245–7). This might seem to ignore the phenomena that led Freud and others to postulate things being 'there' for us in the 'unconscious', but in fact he is quite aware of such phenomena. 'All those facts', he writes,

that were supposed to be explained by the hypothesis of ... unconscious psychic acts can be explained by psychic acts available *as facts of experience* ... These psychic acts are conscious, but not attended to.

(SW I 311)

In other words, the so-called unconscious is really peripheral consciousness (SW II 133, 209): while not every psychic content is the subject of 'reflexive awareness', every psychic content *can* be made the subject of reflexive awareness (SW I 247)—simply by, so it seems, focusing attention on it in the way in which one can focus on the blur in the corner of the visual field and determine that it is a car coming up on the inside lane.¹³ Descriptive psychology is thus the careful, reflective scrutiny of the contents of consciousness with the aim of providing a systematic account of its general, structural features. Because this

could also be offered as a general account of Husserl's phenomenology, it is unsurprising that Dilthey took Husserl and himself to be engaged in the same enterprise.¹⁴

The nexus

Descriptive psychology is, then, the systematic articulation of how we understand each other in real, extra-scientific life. How then do we do that? As Gadamer formulates the same question, 'what happens' when we succeed in understanding each other (GTC I 156)? Dilthey writes:

By descriptive psychology I understand a science that explicates [psychic] constituents and their connections in terms of a single nexus that appears uniformly in all mature human psychic life—a nexus that is not inferred or postulated but experienced.

(SW II 127)

Clearly the idea of a 'connectedness' or 'nexus (*Zusammenhang*)' is central to Dilthey's conception of descriptive psychology.

Dilthey's account of 'the nexus' is at once an exercise in descriptive psychology and an account of what it is to be a person. (In German academic prose, *Anthropologie* and *Psychologie* can be used interchangeably.) The British empiricists found the concept of a person problematic: Hume, for example, finding no introspective impression of a 'self', concluded that there is no such thing as a persisting subject of experience. Kant did better than the empiricists in rejecting the 'bundle' account of the self and postulating instead the 'transcendental synthesis of apperception' (SW II 191). But, says Dilthey, the Kantian subject is a fiction, or at least an abstraction, a purely intellectual, 'bloodless' 'I think' that (in Kant's own words) 'must be able to accompany all my representations' (SW I 50). To be true to life, an account of the human subject must embrace 'the whole human being' (*ibid.*) who is, we have seen (p. 10 above), the unity of the cognitive, affective, and conative. Dilthey calls this entity which will constitute his account of the self the 'nexus' of all these things; the unity of a person is the unity of a nexus.

Dilthey uses a geological metaphor to explicate the psychic nexus. Thought of as, let us say, a stratified piece of rock, at the top is a layer of cognition, the totality of one's knowledge and beliefs about the world. A 'cross sectional cut' (SW II 173) performed at a given moment in time, however, reveals, beneath this stratum, another, affective-conative stratum, a stratum consisting of drives, feelings, valuings, and volitions. All of the elements in this structure are intimately connected: valuations presuppose feelings and volitions presuppose valuations. There are, moreover, intimate connections between the cognitive and the affective-conative strata. In multiple ways, the cognitive influences the affective. It does so in obvious ways—the knowledge that someone is having

an affair with my spouse changes my feelings about them—but also in more subtle ways: as Goethe showed, if one looks at the same landscape through differently coloured glass, one's mood tends to change (SW II 174). More powerful, however, is the influence of the affective–conative on the cognitive (an influence which accounts for the fictional nature of the Kantian subject): mostly, something registers at all at the cognitive level only if it is an object of 'interest', of positive or negative feeling and desire. (This is Schopenhauer's account of the pragmatic nature of perception: because they are irrelevant to their practical interests, dogs, he thinks, do not see the stars.)¹⁵ The affective–conative, a 'bundle of drives and feelings', is, says Dilthey, 'the core of our psychic structure' (SW II 177). Unlike Kant and much like Hume, therefore, Dilthey takes reason to be, while not the 'slave' of the passions, subservient to them. That is why, as we have seen, different worldviews are the products of different personality types (p. 10 above).

The structural whole that is a person is 'teleological' or 'purposive': the goal around which its 'core' is organised is not Darwinian self-preservation but rather 'the satisfaction of our drives and happiness'. Within the core, its component parts are organised 'organically' so that each contributes to the primary goal of happiness (whatever it is that constitutes the individual's happiness) (SW II 178). This pyramidal conception of personality is one that reappears in Sartre: a personality, he believes, is defined by a 'highest project' and all one's lesser projects are those that contribute more or less directly to the highest one.

Like a spatial object, the 'psychic whole' has a temporal dimension; it develops through time. This (the process of maturation) is a topic often treated by literary psychologists (by the writers of *Bildungsromane* in particular) and is a matter of the higher drives taking over from the lower ones. This process often involves pain (the pain of a 'learning experience'), which the pessimists quite wrongly suppose to be the opposite of pleasure (SW II 191). Maturation is not a matter of a single drive dominating from the start. Maturity neither is, nor should be, the goal of childhood: pitiable is the child that has been sacrificed to adulthood (Mozart or J. S. Mill, for example). Healthy maturation is a matter of a higher drive taking over from the lower ones and of the individual's acquiring the self-discipline to maintain the hierarchical structure of drives. The highest achievement of a human being is the establishment of an enduring nexus (a nexus, we have seen, that embraces a worldview [pp. 20–1 above]) so that one ceases to be the plaything of random environmental forces (SW II 183). If the individual achieves a stable nexus, they become, as we say, a person of 'character'. The nexus then becomes the 'sovereign, self-contained source of meaning', which is what Goethe meant when he said of Napoleon, 'voilà un homme!'. As Goethe knew, says Dilthey in this homage to *Bildung*,

[n]othing is as exalted on this earth as a well-shaped soul, and this is what Goethe meant when he called personality the highest fortune of the children of earth.

(SW II 191)

Given that we are not disembodied angels but are rather made out of disorderly clay, becoming a 'homme' (in Yiddish, a 'mensch') is not a birthright but a tremendous achievement.

Objective spirit

People are, then, psychic nexuses, nexuses which, with maturity, reach relative permanence. This process of development does not, of course, occur on a desert island. It occurs in a social environment that has a profound effect on its character: the 'inner psychic nexus is conditioned by the way the psychophysical life-unit [sic] is situated in its milieu' (SW II 183), conditioned because the developing individual has no option but to 'adapt to the [social] conditions of its existence' (SW II 191). From Hegel, Dilthey borrows the term 'objective spirit' to describe this social 'milieu'.

'Objective spirit' is the expression, the 'objectification', of 'spirit' in 'the world of the senses'. It is the 'common [cultural] context of a given community, of those who stand in an 'I and ... thou'—as opposed to the 'I and you'—relation. (This distinction between the intimate and the formal versions of the second person is, we shall see in Chapter 3, central to Martin Buber's social philosophy.) It embraces a particular form of, inter alia, etiquette, economy, law, morality, art, science, and philosophy. In objective spirit, 'the past is a continuing and permanent presence for us': the way we have done things in the past, ethical tradition, is a powerful, though not inflexible, directive towards how we should do them in the future. Even the works of a genius (or the actions of a social rebel) 'represents a community of ideas, an emotional disposition, and ideals in a particular time and place' (DP 126–7).

Even before we can speak, we are conditioned, 'nourished' (DP 126), by objective spirit. (As Husserl and Heidegger put it, we are always 'already in' a cultural heritage [GTC I 128–30].) Simultaneously, objective spirit makes things intelligible and assigns them a normative status, a 'value'. If we belong to the relevant community, the 'spiritual' meaning of a 'square planted with trees' or 'a room in which chairs are arranged' (DP 127) is immediately comprehensible to us, as is our appropriate comportment towards it. As a child, I know that the chair at the head of the table is for the father so that it would be wrong for me to sit there. In the German tavern, I know that the *Stammtisch* is a table at which only regular customers are supposed to sit. In the numinous world of the ancient Greeks, a planting of trees might indicate a sacred spot that one should not enter. As the source of meaning and value, objective spirit is what Husserl called 'the lifeworld' (GTC I 101–2). And as we are about to see, Dilthey's holistic point is that since lifeworlds are different in different times and places, to understand a given psychic phenomenon, one needs to understand the entire lifeworld into which it is woven.

Understanding others

Although Dilthey is not blind to the fact that we often fail to understand ourselves, he points out that when we think of ‘understanding human beings’ as a sometimes baffling task, we are thinking primarily of the problem of understanding other human beings. So much, in fact, is he focused on understanding others that *Verstehen* (understanding) becomes almost a synonym for ‘understanding other people’.

Since individuals are conditioned by it, objective spirit is, says Dilthey, ‘the medium in which the understanding of other persons and their expressions of life comes about’ (DP 126). Understanding others requires understanding the lifeworld in which they become the people they are. But, of course, even within the same form of objective spirit, individuals and their psychic nexuses differ. Hence the task of understanding other people divides into two: that of understanding the relevant objective spirit, and that of understanding the individual nexus located within it. The former Dilthey calls ‘elementary understanding’ the latter ‘higher understanding’.

Elementary understanding

Elementary understanding is the essential presupposition of the understanding of individuals, the ‘medium’ in which it occurs. If one is born into the same objective spirit as the person one seeks to understand, elementary understanding occurs virtually automatically. But if one is not, if one is, for instance, an historian attempting to understand an historical actor, elementary understanding requires a ‘technique’. This is a matter of ‘exegesis or interpretation’, of ‘hermeneutics’ in the usual sense of the term, although Dilthey actually reserves that term for the science that articulates the rules and procedures of the practice, for meta-hermeneutics, in other words (DP 135). The techniques of practical hermeneutics include all the instruments in the anthropologist’s or historian’s toolbox: techniques for distinguishing genuine documents from fake, for using geography and climate as guides to the meaning of social practices (SW I 71), for examining archaeological remains, and so on. The tool that is essential to elementary understanding in all the human sciences is the ‘hermeneutical circle’: the method whereby one understands a whole from its parts and the parts from the whole. Suppose, for example, that one wishes to understand why the Maori stick their tongues out on meeting strangers. One observes a number of cases and forms the hypothesis that the meaning of the gesture is ‘welcome!’ But, further research provides cases that the hypothesis does not fit: on occasion, the gesture is used to initiate warfare. And so, one refines one’s hypothesis: in situations in which there is no threat of war, it means ‘Welcome, but we are ready to deal with anything that offends us!’.

Positivist defenders of the unity of the sciences seize on this account of the hermeneutical circle and point out that it is just the hypothetico-deductive

model applied to correlations between observable events and psychic meanings rather than between cause and effect. There is no separate methodology in the human sciences, they triumphantly claim, only different applications of one and the same methodology.¹⁶ Dilthey, however, happily accepts and even emphasises that the circle and the hypothetico-deductive model are the same. ‘Inductions’ of the above character are, he says,

common to both the natural and the human sciences. Through such an induction Kepler discovered the elliptical path of Mars.

(DP 138)

While the circle is an important element in the methodology of understanding, it is, as we shall see (pp. 27–8 below), not the circle that is intended to distinguish this methodology from that of the natural sciences.

There is a certain amount the historian or anthropologist can understand without needing to engage in interpretation. The elementary actions out of which complex actions are composed, someone’s swinging a hammer, for instance (DP 125), have an evident purpose—to knock in a nail—that can be understood without any knowledge of objective spirit. But a higher-level description, the ‘human meaning’, of the action—that the hammer-wielder is earning his living as a carpenter—depends on a knowledge of the kinds of craft institutions of the society in question and the roles they establish (DP 128). Other actions, bodily gestures, for example, have no self-evident purpose and can only be understood by gaining knowledge of objective spirit (DP 125–6). To return to the Maori tongue-projection, while in the Maori lifeworld, it is a qualified welcome, in other lifeworlds, it is an expression of defiance or contempt.

Projection, re-creation, and re-experiencing

‘Higher’ understanding presupposes elementary understanding which provides its meaningful elements. Its object is usually an individual person, and the necessity for it occurs when the meaning of a person’s action or gesture cannot simply be read off from an objective spirit common to both subject and interpreter. This may occur because the individual has departed from the conventions of the common lifeworld, in which case one looks for a new sub-convention under which the behaviour can be brought (DP 129–30): my daughter starts to wear nothing but black and a gloomy expression, and I eventually understand her by realising that she has joined the Gothic subculture. A more challenging form of higher understanding occurs when interpreter and the interpreted have no lifeworld in common, as may occur in the attempt to understand a work of fiction, an historical actor, or a person from an alien culture.

As we know, the crucial principle in understanding an individual action is that the identity or meaning of an action is determined by the total psychological nexus, which is the person in question. Hence to understand, for example, an historical actor, to understand, say, whether Lincoln prosecuted the war against the Confederacy from moral conviction or from more pragmatic motives, we need to imaginatively ‘project ourselves (*sich hineinversetzen*)’ into the totality of the actor’s psychic nexus. And since that nexus is powerfully conditioned by the historical lifeworld, this requires the hermeneutical ‘spadework’ that provides the elementary understanding of the lifeworld in question. This allows one to ‘project’ oneself into the situation of someone living *within* the historical world who is trying to understand the actor in question (DP 137). (While ‘originalists’ believe the meaning of the American Constitution is determined by the intended meanings of the Founding Fathers who wrote it, ‘textualists’ believe its meaning is the meaning it would have had for the general eighteenth-century public.) But, of course, different actors in that world act from different motives. To understand why *Lincoln* acted as he did, we need to project ourselves not just into his world and into the political situation he faced at the crucial moment, but also into the ‘inner psychic nexus’ (SW II 183) that makes Lincoln the unique person that he is. One needs to project oneself not merely into his general situation but into his very ‘shoes’. Having done that, having projected oneself into both the world and into the innermost personality of the actor, one is in a position to ‘re-create (*nachbilden*)’ and ‘re-experience (*nacherleben*)’ the psychic nexus that is the historical actor (DP 132–3). Note that this highest form of higher understanding involves a double transposition: one transports oneself into the inner life of the historical actor and then transports oneself back into one’s own life bringing with one novel experiences. This, says Dilthey, is a life-enriching exercise: though not religious himself, his reading of Luther replaced his scepticism towards religious experience with a deep appreciation of its value. Projection and re-experiencing, he says, ‘widens our horizons’ (DP 134). (Although Gadamer represents himself as Dilthey’s critic, this seems to be what ‘fusion of horizons’ amounts to, in at least one of its meanings [GTC I 173–5].)

Contrary to the way he is often represented, Dilthey goes out of his way to emphasise that this highest form of understanding does not depend on ‘empathy (*Einfühlen*)’ (DP 133)—though empathy can occur as part of the process, and if it does, it can ‘increase the energy of the re-experiencing’ (DP 133). But how, one might ask, is it possible to ‘project’ oneself into the situation of the other without that projection amounting to empathy, to one’s temporarily *becoming* the other in an act of, as Gadamer’s critique of Dilthey satirically puts it, ‘epic self-forgetfulness’ (GTC I 169), an act Gadamer considers impossible? ‘Projecting myself into the other’s situation’, it would seem, must mean one of two things: projecting myself into that situation *together with* the ‘bundle of drives and feelings’ that are the ‘core’ of my own personality (p. 21 above), or else projecting myself *without* my actual ‘core’ personality.

In the former case, I will probably misunderstand the other, since with my actual personality, I would likely act differently from the person I am trying to understand. But in the latter case, it would seem, one *is* engaging in empathy, in *imaginatively becoming* the other person. And so it might seem that understanding through projection and re-experiencing, when it is successful, must consist in understanding through empathy.

Crucial to Dilthey's rejection of 'empathy' is his grounding presupposition that human individuals differ only 'quantitatively', never 'qualitatively' (SW II 206 et passim). (The same idea appears in, and is probably derived from, Schopenhauer's account of how portraiture can be of a particular individual yet possess the universality of great art. His answer is that we all possess at least a small amount of each of the elements contained in the 'many-sided idea of humanity', and that what great portraiture does is to accentuate that facet of universal human nature especially prominent in the subject of the portrait. It does this, however, without losing sight of the universal idea, on pain of degenerating into mere caricature.)¹⁷ We all have at least a touch of each of the facets of human nature—we all have a touch of both the saint and the devil—so that what we do in projection (as, perhaps, in method acting) is to emphasise some human trait that is perhaps recessive in oneself but dominant in the other. Projective understanding thus involves neither 'becoming' the other nor projecting one's exact self into the other's situation. What one projects, rather, is a modified self, a self that is modified to match the balance of drives and desires that constitute the other's personality. (See pp. 78 below for Edith Stein's elaboration and clarification of this point.) Projective understanding presupposes that there is no qualitative otherness about the other. If there is, then understanding becomes impossible. This, says Dilthey, is why we do so badly in trying to understand the psychic life of animals. We do reasonably well with primates, but the highly intelligent life of bees and ants is beyond our comprehension, as is the manner in which spiders represent space (SW II 170–1). (As Thomas Nagel points out, the answer to 'What's it like to be a bat?' is that we have no idea.)¹⁸

Is *Verstehen* really a scientific method?

Understanding, then, the understanding of the inner life of individuals who are to some degree alien to oneself, has two phases to it: the scholarly and interpretative 'spadework' that allows one to understand the other's lifeworld, and the imaginative projection of oneself—or rather a reconfigured version of oneself—into the shoes of the other. This then is the methodology Dilthey believes should be adopted by the human sciences in general. And because it bears 'no kind of analogy to the method of the natural sciences' (DP 137), there really is a fundamental difference between the natural and human sciences, between the sciences of *Erklären* and the sciences of *Verstehen*. But is *Verstehen* really a *scientific* methodology?

Why, first of all, is there ‘no analogy’ between the putative methodology of *Verstehen* and the methodology of the natural sciences? Dilthey makes it clear, we have seen (pp. 23–4 above), that as far as elementary understanding goes, its ‘logical’ procedure (DP 137) is no different from that of the deductive-nomological logic of the natural sciences: one inductively forms an initial hypothesis as to the psychic meaning of some cultural practice and refines it where necessary as further facts come to light (p. 23 above). The distinctness of *Verstehen* lies, therefore, in the methodology of higher understanding, specifically in the methodology of projection, re-creation, and re-experiencing. This methodology makes essential use of psychic data that are available only from the first-person point of view, data which are then projected in modified form into the psyche of the person to be understood. Rocks, however, have no psyches, and to the extent the natural sciences study beings with psyches, they ignore them. Hence the method of *Verstehen* is essentially different from that of *Erklären*. But, to repeat, is the methodology of *Verstehen* really a *scientific* methodology?

As Gadamer notes (GTC I 169–70), Dilthey’s philosophical outlook is an unstable mixture of Enlightenment positivism, according to which science is the only path to truth, and a Romantic, or neo-Romantic, reaction against it. We have already seen Dilthey’s positivistic impulses at work in his assumption that it is possible to articulate all of the intuitive knowledge of the great poets in the form of systematic science (p. 19 above). Heidegger pillories this Enlightenment outlook as the view that

considers philosophical thinking as liberating the mythological poem from the mythical and as recasting its remaining content into the rigid grid and debris of empty concepts. According to this view, thinking in general is nothing other than the ‘demythologising’ of the myth. One represents this process as though it were draining a marshland, a process that, when complete, leaves ‘dry’ ground remaining. As though thinking already lay waiting within the poeticizing and needed only to be liberated from the poetic.¹⁹

Much of the time Dilthey aspires to ‘drain the swamp’. On the other hand, there are many passages in which he emphasises the limits to the scientific understanding of human beings, the essential mystery of human individuality that places their innermost core beyond the reach of science. ‘Individuum’, he writes, ‘est ineffabile’: ultimately, human individuals are, from the point of view of science, ‘ineffable’ (SW I 81). It is to this idea that he appeals to explain why, in the end, there is ‘no analogy’ between ‘understanding’ and ‘explanation’: there is no analogy because

there is something irrational (*Irrationales*) in all understanding, just as life itself is irrational. It cannot be captured in a logical formula. There is a final (though completely subjective) certainty which lies in [projection, re-creation and]

re-experiencing, that cannot be replaced by any cognitively tested inferences that explicate the process of understanding. There are limits which are set to the logical treatment of understanding by its very nature

(DP 137, SW III 239)

—its nature, that is, as the study of ultimately ‘ineffable’ human beings. Was Lincoln moved by moral conviction or by pragmatic political calculations? Historians all have access to the same historical evidence, but some support the former view and some the latter. The truth of the matter is beyond the reach of evidential inference and can, therefore, be reached only by the method of projection, re-creation, and re-experiencing, the method which, following Schleiermacher, Dilthey sometimes calls ‘divination’ (SW IV 158). Divination is, then, essential to the highest forms of understanding. Scientific spadework prepares the medium in which it occurs, but higher understanding itself is divination, and divination, Dilthey finally concedes, is not science. Whereas science, as science, is a path to objective and demonstrable truth, divination can produce only ‘subjective certainty’—recall that the reason the presentation of worldviews is not science is that they rely on ‘persuasion’ rather than proof (p. 9 above). Dilthey’s final position is thus very much like Gadamer’s, even though Gadamer presents himself as Dilthey’s critic. The work of the poets, great literature, is, he is convinced, a source of profound psychological insight concerning human beings. But at the deepest level, such knowledge cannot be captured by—any—scientific method. As Gadamer says, method does not have a monopoly on truth.

Dilthey’s achievement

‘Nature we explain, psychic life we understand’. This is the thesis for which Dilthey is remembered: the distinction between *Erklären*, supposedly *the* method of the natural sciences, and *Verstehen*, supposedly *the* method of the human sciences. As it bears on the human sciences, the thesis is composed of two sub-theses, which at first glance, seem to be these: (A) there is a single method that is used by all the human sciences, the method of understanding, and (B) although distinct from the method used by the natural sciences, the method of understanding is a genuinely scientific method. As we have seen, Dilthey eventually admits that (B) is false: while understanding can produce ‘subjective certainty’, it cannot produce objective, demonstrable knowledge. What, however, of (A)?

Although Dilthey’s famous sentence appears to claim that *Verstehen* is the method ‘we’ practicing human scientists actually use, this is not really his claim. For since he attacks explanatory psychology as a then-currently practiced mode of psychology, he knows perfectly well that, in some psychological research centres, *Verstehen* is practiced not at all. And so (A) is actually not

a descriptive but rather a prescriptive claim: *Verstehen* ought to be the—one and only—method practiced by each of the human sciences. (For the next few paragraphs, I shall use ‘human sciences’ to mean simply ‘those disciplines identified by Dilthey as falling under the term “human science”’ [pp. 15–16 above].)

Why should we believe that there is *any* single method, let alone the method of *Verstehen*, that ought to be practiced throughout the human sciences? Because, one imagines Dilthey answering, by definition, what the human sciences have in common is that they seek to understand humanity. Here, however, one needs to be aware of the slipperiness of the term ‘understand’.

Anglophone Dilthey scholars frequently leave *Erklären* and *Verstehen* untranslated. There is a good reason for this. For while genuinely contrasting terms exclude each other, as ordinarily understood, ‘explanation’ and ‘understanding’ do not: to explain my smile as caused by the wish to greet the stranger is to understand it; to understand it as a friendly greeting it to surmise its causal explanation. As Dilthey uses *Erklären* and *Verstehen*, however, they do exclude each other. And so the two terms, and *Verstehen* in particular, function as quasi-technical terms, their meaning determined by Dilthey rather than by common usage. While it is true, therefore, that each of the human sciences is dedicated to understanding some aspect of human life in the ordinary sense of ‘understanding’, it is far from clear that they ought to do this via the methodology of *Verstehen*. Dilthey’s strongest objection to explanatory psychology, we saw, is to its superficiality: it fails to plumb the depths of the human psyche in the way the great poets do. But to this, explanatory psychologists—together with economists, sociologists, and some political scientists—will simply reply that they are not interested in depth, only in the ability to predict and control, or at least influence, human behaviour. And since this is precisely what the methodology of the natural sciences is good at achieving, that is the correct methodology for their enterprise. Explanatory psychology has, then, no interest in the method of *Verstehen*. For a different reason, neither does another of the human sciences, namely that version of analytic philosophy which understands philosophy, as Dilthey wishes it to be understood, as the science of sciences.

While all the human sciences seek to ‘understand’ some aspect of humanity, then, there is no reason to believe that they ought to do so via the method of *Verstehen*. And in fact, I can see no reason to believe that they ought to have *any* methodology in common. Methodology is relative to goals, and since the different human sciences have different goals, they should be allowed the methodology appropriate to their particular goals. What this means is that Dilthey’s claim that there ought to be a methodological—to coin a phrase—‘unity of the human sciences’ is false. And, as he himself eventually admits, his claim that *Verstehen* is a scientific methodology is also false. And so the two major theses associated with his name are both false. Yet, somehow, one still senses that Dilthey is an impressive and important philosopher, which he was certainly taken to be

by indisputably impressive and important philosophers such as Heidegger and Gadamer. Why, then, is Dilthey important? What is his achievement?

Part of his importance is that he genuinely helps us understand, in Gadamer's phrase, 'what happens' when we understand each other from the first-person point of view, understand each other's psychic lives. His major contribution to the understanding of understanding is his holism, his insight that, as the proper understanding of the queen depends on understanding the game of chess as a whole, so understanding any element in the 'psychic nexus' that is a person depends on understanding it as a totality. This insight is derived from his keen sense of the historicity of ordinary consciousness, of the historian's need to understand an entire historical world as a condition of understanding the motives of an historical actor. As Lee Braver points out, this same insight is contained in Wittgenstein's insistence that to understand a person—to understand what they say—is to understand an entire 'form of life'. Since we have no experience of a lion's form of life, Wittgenstein concludes that 'If a lion could talk, we could not understand him'.²⁰ As Dilthey would put Wittgenstein's point, to understand the 'psychic content' of the leonine utterances, we would need to perform the impossible task of imaginatively projecting ourselves into the leonine lifeworld.

A further important aspect of his work is his contribution to philosophical anthropology, his account of a person as a nexus of the cognitive, affective, and conative, where these elements are woven into an interconnected whole within which they are 'equi-original' (p. 7 above). This seems to me an important corrective to the usual account of the mind as composed of autonomous faculties (usually 'reason' and 'the passions') faculties that sometimes cooperate but are also capable of operating independently of each other.

How does Dilthey's contribution to the understanding of understanding and to philosophical anthropology relate to his lifelong concern with the human sciences? Although he overreached himself in attempting to establish *Verstehen* as the method of the human sciences, it remains important as a method: a method that (as Jaspers realised [note 12]) is important for humanistic forms of psychology and psychotherapy, for originalists and textualists within legal hermeneutics, for literary and art critics who do not assume the author to be 'dead', and—Dilthey's original concern—for narrative history. In general, Dilthey shows that there is a way of studying human beings other than reducing them to calculable units via the methodology of the natural sciences. In doing so, he provides a bulwark against the 'rationalization' (or in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's more dramatic language, 'totalitarianism') that Weber identifies as the distinctive feature of modern society (GTC I chap. 1).

Notes

1 Arendt (1945) 404.

2 The German *Wissenschaft* ('science') covers both the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Philosophy is thus a *Geisteswissenschaft*.

- 3 Mul (2004) 272.
- 4 Warren (2019) 185–6.
- 5 Husserl (2002) 279.
- 6 Hadot (1995).
- 7 BT 398. The following note gives the reference for Husserl's claim.
- 8 Beiser (2012) 359. See Husserl (2002) 279 ff. for the 'insinuation'.
- 9 Beiser (2012) 360–1.
- 10 In 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science', Husserl writes, 'no philosophical system has ever met the standards of rigorous science' (Husserl [2002] 289) and, given that philosophy must be 'rigorous science', concludes that no traditionally conceived philosophy should count as 'philosophy'. But when he is at his most cogent, this is Dilthey's view too. In attacking Dilthey as a 'philosopher of life' (BT 293), Husserl mistakes a reluctant friend for an enemy.
- 11 Beiser (2012) 322. This is Beiser's own summation of Dilthey's view.
- 12 Hodges (1944) 107–8. Arendt, in her review of this book, claims that Hodges
highly overrates Dilthey's influence on modern existentialist philosophers. He calls Karl Jaspers [Arendt's close friend and former thesis supervisor] a disciple of Dilthey and quotes in support of this thesis the *Psychologie der Weltanschauung*
in which, claims Arendt, 'Jaspers quoted Dilthey but once' (Arendt [1945] 406). Arendt is mistaken: he actually mentions Dilthey five times, always with respect. In his 'Philosophical Autobiography', moreover, he states that the methodology of his first book, his *General Psychopathology*, and of the *Psychology of Worldviews* itself, actually is Dilthey's 'descriptive and analytic psychology', which he christened *verstehende Psychologie*, to distinguish it from brain-based psychology—the *erklärende Psychologie*—of most of his colleagues in psychiatry (Schilpp [1957] 18, 25). As we shall shortly see, the distinction between *Verstehen* (understanding) and *Erklären* (explanation) is what establishes Dilthey as an important figure in the history of philosophy.
- 13 While an interesting idea, it is hard to see how Dilthey is doing more than simply ignoring the Freudian phenomena of repression and resistance. If he acknowledges such phenomena, then peripheral consciousness collapses into the unconscious. It seems to me that his antipathy to 'constructed' as opposed to 'given' entities has likely misled him with respect to the unconscious.
- 14 Beiser (2012) 339.
- 15 Schopenhauer (1891) 299.
- 16 See Føllesdal (1979).
- 17 Schopenhauer (1969) I 221–5.
- 18 Nagel (1974).
- 19 Heidegger (1996) 111–12.
- 20 Quoted in Braver (2019) 244.

2 Karl Jaspers

The first existentialist

Karl Jaspers was born in 1883 in Oldenburg near the North Sea. He studied medicine at the University of Heidelberg and became a psychiatrist. In 1913, he published his *General Psychopathology*, which has the character of an early version of the DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*). From 1913 to 1921, he was a junior professor in the philosophy faculty at Heidelberg, during which time he published his *Psychology of Worldviews* (*Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*) (1919). In 1921, he became a full professor at Heidelberg, and in 1931, he published his magnum opus, the three-volume *Philosophy* (*Philosophie*). In 1937, he was dismissed from his post by the Nazis because his wife, Gertrude, was Jewish. He remained steadfastly loyal to her throughout the Nazi period, so that they both lived in perpetual fear of transportation to a concentration camp. After the war, Jaspers was quickly restored to his professorship in Heidelberg by the occupying American forces. As one of the few German professors untainted by Nazism, he became an important public intellectual, promoting liberal-democratic values as Germany attempted to come to terms with its past and future. (I shall have more to say about Jaspers' postwar political views at the beginning of section III below.) In 1947, he was awarded the prestigious Goethe Prize as someone who, 'free of the poison of the time', had given 'form and influence' to the spirit of Goethe.¹ In the following year, however, he accepted a position at the German-speaking University of Basel in Switzerland, where he remained for the rest of his life. Jaspers' most important interlocutors were Martin Heidegger, with whom his relationship oscillated between friendship and enmity, and his former student Hannah Arendt, who remained a close friend until his death in 1969.

Jaspers' importance in the history of philosophy is as one of the founders, really *the* founder, of what we know as 'existentialism'. As he notes, his *Psychology of Worldviews* is the 'the first work written in the later so-called modern existentialism' (J 28). This work will be the topic of section I. Section II will be devoted to *Philosophy*, which expands and develops the ideas of the *Psychology*, and in section III I shall turn to the postwar writings, writings in which, existentialism, while less visible than in the prewar works, is, I shall suggest, still present.

Section I: Existential psychiatry

Given its historical importance, it is surprising that *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* has never been translated into English. As is well known, Heidegger's *Being and Time* adopts central concepts from the work, in particular, the notions of the 'limit situation' and the 'moment of vision'.² He also wrote a long critical review of the book.³ Less well known is that Jaspers' book was an important influence on both Sartre and Camus (for the latter, we shall see, by providing him with something to hate).⁴ Jaspers acknowledges Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as his most important predecessors, describing them as 'the greatest psychologists of worldviews' there have ever been. Abandoning Hegel's detached, historical horizons, he says, they reflected upon their own lived experience and in particular on the question of 'authenticity' (*Echtheit*) (PW 12). Jaspers' book is, among other things, then, an important point of transmission between existentialism's nineteenth-century ancestors and its twentieth-century exponents, Sartre, Camus, and, in a qualified sense, Heidegger.

Philosophy or psychology?

On the face of things, as its title suggests, the *Psychology of Worldviews* is a continuation of the *General Psychopathology*, a continuation of Jaspers' concern with 'psychology'. Its apparent concern is to provide a philosophy-inflected 'catalogue' (PW 16) of 'spiritual types' where each type represents an at least potential pathology. In the Foreword, he explains why the book is not entitled *Philosophy of Worldviews*. It has been the task of philosophy, he says—repeating Dilthey's definition of traditional philosophy (pp. 8–9 above)—'to develop a worldview that is simultaneously both scientific knowledge and an account of how to live'. This, he says, is not his aim: the book will provide no 'direct answer' to the question of how to live. All it offers are 'clarifications and possibilities as the means for self-reflection'.

Jaspers' claim that his book offers no 'direct answer' is, in a way, correct. Unlike, as he calls it, 'prophetic philosophy' (PW 2), it endorses no particular worldview. It is, he points out, neither optimistic nor pessimistic, optimism and pessimism being, as Dilthey asserts (p. 7 above), the two broad genera within which worldviews are to be classified (PW 247). It does, however, offer an account of how the 'authentic (*echtes*)' individual acquires and loses worldviews, and in reality, as will become clear, this itself amounts to a worldview: a second-order worldview of how the authentic individual deals with first-order worldviews. Eventually, in response to Heidegger's claim that the book is by no means the work of detached, neutral observation it purports to be,⁵ in the Foreword to the third, 1925 edition of the work, Jaspers admits that

without my being aware of it or wishing it at the time, my whole approach in the book and method of analysis expresses a hidden ideal. I fully acknowledge this now that I have become aware of it.⁶

(Although he never did, one might well feel that Heidegger should have made a similar admission with respect to *Being and Time*'s rhetoric of authenticity.) My principal aim in section I of this chapter is to articulate the 'hidden ideal' at the heart of *Psychology of Worldviews*' 'existentialist' philosophy.

Worldviews again

The origin of psychic life, says Jaspers, is what William James called the 'stream of consciousness'. An individual 'I' comes into being through the imposition of 'form on chaos', the imposition of a subject-object division that separates experiences into experiences of the self and experiences of the world. Not all experiences fall under the subject-object rubric. Mysticism (and, one might add, certain forms of aesthetic experience) is precisely the absence of such a dichotomy: but it is also the absence of the 'I' of human individuality (PW 19–20).

Given the subject-object dichotomy, it follows that worldviews have both a subjective and an objective side to them. The objective aspect is a 'world image' (*Weltbild*), the subjective aspect, the *Einstellung*, the 'attitude' or 'frame of mind', which gives rise to such images: all world images, says Jaspers, again closely following Dilthey (p. 10 above), express 'needs of the soul' (PW 4).

The *Einstellungen* that give rise to world images are, to repeat, either optimistic or pessimistic, either life-affirming or 'nihilistic'. Thus Buddhism, which has nothingness, escape from the cycle of rebirth, as its highest value, is the expression of a nihilistic spirit (PW 233–4), while world images generated by the desire either to understand or change the world express life affirmation. To the various *Einstellungen* correspond Jaspers' 'catalogue' of spiritual types. Historical epochs as well as individuals can be classified in terms of such types, so that the one-word labels used by Hegel and others to characterise historical epochs can also be used to characterise types of individuals: 'romantic', 'rationalist', 'technologist', and so on (PW 10–11, 251).

Jaspers' world images are a combination of ontological frameworks and value systems. As Kant established, he observes (PW 23, 97), the objectification of experience is a creation of the mind: that we experience our world as a world of discrete spatio-temporal entities is due to the mental 'glasses' (PW 125) through which experience is filtered and objectified. Superimposed on the objects within our world image are values. Objects do not have values in

themselves: rather, claims Jaspers, values are the product of subjective tastes and desires (PW 191).

One might assume that each of Jaspers' world images would have its own distinct way of objectifying the real, its own ontology. But this is not Jaspers' view. Following Kant, he tacitly assumes that there is a single scheme of spatio-temporal entities common to all human beings. (In *Philosophy*, this assumption is made explicit: 'objective being' claims Jaspers, 'is the same for everyone' [P I 77].) The result is that worldviews are differentiated from each other entirely in terms of their axiological component. This is also true of Weber—whom Jaspers knew and greatly admired—for whom 'worldviews' are simply irreconcilable 'value spheres' (GTC I 11). (This picture of a shared world of objects with subjectively variable values attached according to different people's tastes, is mistaken. Ontology and valuation are inseparably connected. To know, for example, that something is a person rather than a machine is to know that it has a value, commands a respect, that machines lacks.⁷ Jaspers had no formal training in philosophy and, as he himself tacitly admits, prior to his 'serious study' of the subject in 1922 [J 34], his acquaintance with it was that of an enthusiastic amateur. One can see why, along with his genuine appreciation of Jaspers' book, Heidegger also had serious reservations.)

Values, Jaspers believes, form a hierarchy. Everyone's values, he claims, form a pyramidal structure with a 'highest good' or 'telos' at the top (PW 200 et passim).⁸ The inhabitants of a given worldview take their values to be absolute, their hierarchy to be objectively true and all other hierarchies false. They take their values to belong on the side of the objectively given rather than subjectively chosen. But such 'absolutization' is mistaken: values, to repeat, are individual 'perspectives' so that, in principle, there are as many value hierarchies, as many world images, as there are individuals. None is superior to the others (PW 191, 268, 286).

The 'hidden ideal'

Worldviews are, says Jaspers, *Gehäuse*. As such, they are both necessary—one of the meanings of *Gehäuse* is 'housing', or, at a stretch, 'home'—but also potentially pathological: another meaning is 'casing', 'shell' or, at a stretch, 'cage'.⁹ As a spiritual-intellectual 'housing', they provide a 'hold' or 'halt' (*Halt*), a set of foundational certainties without which—again, the basic insight comes from Dilthey—one's life would be 'destroyed' (PW 248). Part of the thought here may be that without the 'objectification' of one's environment into a structure of spatio-temporal entities, one would not survive. But, as noted, the focus of Jaspers' attention is almost entirely confined to the hierarchy of values embedded within a world image, so his examples of 'holds' are almost exclusively axiological: 'dogmas, things proved, traditional

institutions, absolute moral demands' (PW 269). We have, says Jaspers, a fundamental need to halt the regress of justification, to inhabit foundational principles that provide what we take to be 'objective justification' for our lives and actions (PW 250).

Gehäuse become pathological, become 'cages', when an 'abyss' opens up between one's worldview, on the one hand, and one's 'essential', 'factual', 'authentic (*echtes*)' self (PW 84), on the other (PW 84). The appearance of such an abyss is, Jaspers believes, inevitable (PW 7). Partly, he bases this claim on common-sense observation. We are, he notes, extremely attached to our worldviews. 'Homesickness', for instance, is nostalgia for the worldview, the way of life, in which we grew up. So attached are we that loss of one's native way of life is experienced as the loss of the self: 'With the loss of the homeland the 'I' has been lost too' (PW 127). Nonetheless, no one inhabits the same image of themselves and their world their entire life (PW 83). Even the most rigid of us are to some extent 'plastic' (PW 85), subject to development, or at least change. Underlying this common-sense observation, however, is a metaphysics that comes (likely via Nietzsche) from Heraclitus, a major presence in the *Psychology of Worldviews* (Jaspers defers to him on 13 separate occasions). At the most general level, the Heraclitean view is that 'the absolute' is not, as Parmenides claimed, 'being' but rather 'becoming' (PW 175). Jaspers says that the 'cornerstone' of his psychology of worldviews is a particular experience of 'life':

It is a pulsating life of expansion and contraction, self-giving and self-preservation, love and loneliness, of confluence and struggle, of assertion, contradiction and fusion, of destruction and rebuilding.

(PW 7)

Within this life we 'allow our own "I" to broaden, dissolve (*zerfließen*) and then collect itself once more' (ibid.). Or rather, we do so if we live healthy, 'authentic' lives.

Here Jaspers' 'hidden ideal' emerges. It is the ideal of 'authenticity (*Echtheit*)'¹⁰ understood as attunement to the flux, to the everchanging flow of our 'factual life', the life of our 'being, desires and tendencies' (PW 7). One can of course resist the flow. The dissolution of a worldview, and with it a 'self', is a terrifying experience. We have a drive to resist everything that might call it into question, to cling desperately to the 'hold' into which we have grown. But if we do that our psychic life becomes 'ossified' (PW 250), 'dead' (PW 269), in other words, inauthentic. (This is a pre-echo of Sartre's account of 'bad faith' as the attempt to convince oneself that one is a 'thing' with a fixed essence: the robotic Paris waiter who wants to think that he is inescapably a waiter in the way that a tree is inescapably a tree.)¹¹ An authentic life, by contrast, is one that commits itself to the task of constant 'self-forming' and

re-forming, to—a word evidently taken over from Nietzsche—continual ‘self-overcoming’ (PW 85, 281 et passim). Since the life of the real self is always in flux, this task is ‘infinite’, never-ending (PW 83–7).

A peculiarity of Jaspers’ book that he does not address concerns the relation between the ideal of authenticity and his catalogue of spiritual types. ‘The question of someone’s spiritual type’ is, he says, ‘the question of where he finds his hold’ (PW 202). As we have seen, spiritual types correspond to *Gehäuse*, to worldviews. But the authentic individual can be assigned no unique worldview since there is no ‘hold’ that arrests the never-ending process of psychic self-transformation. This means that the authentic individual escapes categorisation within Jasper’s typology. Perhaps, given that it is a typology of potential pathologies, that is Jaspers’ point. Or perhaps he would wish to introduce a second-order spiritual type to identify the individual who never terminates the process of dissolving and re-forming worldviews: ‘the seafarer’ might be the title of such an individual, given that, in Nietzsche’s manner, Jaspers compares the world of one who is never ‘caged’ by a fixed worldview to ‘the ocean’ (PW 293).

Limit situations

Authentic individuals inhabit, dissolve, and create new worldviews for themselves. But how do they do this? What enables the exit from the cage of a worldview that now lags behind, ‘contradicts’ (PW 7), the current state of one’s real, factical self? The answer is that one allows oneself to enter the ‘limit situation (*Grenzsituation*)’.¹²

Limit situations are crises in one’s life—the famous ‘midlife crisis’ might be one. They are situations in which we reach the ‘limit’—as it were, the use-by date—of the worldview, the form of life, we have inhabited up to now. All of us are subliminally aware of periodic crisis situations, but because they are situations of ‘trauma’ (PW 298), we often try to repress them. When this happens, we no longer inhabit our *Gehäuse* in the ‘naïve and living manner’ of a healthy individual, but ‘absolutize’ them, cling to them in a ‘fanatical’ manner (PW 270 et passim) as a pathological defence against the limit situation.

When a limit situation becomes an explicit and transformative experience, two things happen. First, one becomes aware of one’s existing worldview, one’s hierarchy of values, *as* a worldview, as one of many possible ways of imposing order on experience, decision upon perplexity. Second, that worldview must be ‘called into question’ (PW 248) as something no longer congruent with one’s real self, as something lagging behind one’s real needs and desires.

Limit situations arise because of the ‘antinomies’, the ‘contradictions’, that are an inescapable part of life: ‘contradiction’, says Jaspers, ‘is the general form of all limit situations’ (PW 204). The contradiction constitutive of a limit situation may be of either ‘subjective’ or ‘objective’ origin (PW 205–12). Subjective

antinomies arise from the unique psychology and life situation of a given individual. Jaspers cites the example of the renowned physicist Franz Neumann, who faced an agonising choice between managing the family farm and supporting his sickly mother, on the one hand, and following his scientific gifts and desires, on the other (PW 295–6). (Sartre's famous account of the dilemma of the man who had to choose between supporting his frail mother and joining the French resistance may have been inspired by this example.) Objective antinomies, by contrast, are rooted in the human condition as such and thus concern all human beings. They are, as one might put it, 'philosophical' crises. They consist in an inevitable collision between the will and the world. Jaspers provides four examples of objective limit situations which he entitles 'struggle', 'contingency', 'guilt', and 'death'. I shall describe them in that order in the following four paragraphs.

As the religious impulse testifies, human beings have a deep yearning for peace and harmony. But reality renders that impossible. We find ourselves in the limit situation of 'struggle (*Kampf*)' in which our yearning for peace comes face to face with the Heraclitean equation between life and struggle: the Darwinian struggle in the non-human domain, war, economic, ideological, and personal conflict, in the human domain (PW 227–9).

We need to regard life as necessarily progressing towards a goal. But to see the world as science does is to see that the only necessity in it is causal necessity. From a purposive point of view, everything is 'contingency (*Zufall*)', 'chaotic', meaningless (PW 239–42). As Nietzsche (by whom this passage is clearly influenced) puts it, to look at the world through the clear, factual eyes of science is to see that all our attempts to give meaning to it are mere 'aesthetic anthropomorphisms' (*The Gay Science* sec. 109).

Another of our desires is the yearning for 'ethical purity'. But the unintended yet inevitable consequences of action are such that to affirm one value is inevitably to negate another: to attempt to realise high culture, for instance, is inevitably to exploit those who sustain it (PW 210). Existential 'guilt (*Schuld*)', 'original sin' in religious language, is inescapable. For there to be action of any kind, it must be, as Goethe put it, 'conscienceless' (PW 242–7). 'Conscience', observes Hamlet, 'makes cowards of us all'.

'Life', says Goethe, 'is too short for our souls'. Whatever our particular worldview, our particular project in the world, the fact of 'death (*Tod*)' (PW 229–39), the approach of 'nothingness', appears to render that project futile: 'Death is the contradiction of life' in all its manifestations (PW 204).

Jaspers identifies three kinds of reactions to the limit situation, reactions which are, respectively, pathological, inauthentic, and authentic. The first is a self-destructive, 'nihilistic' response. In the face of the inevitability of struggle, death, contingency, or guilt, one may renounce action, a decision that, in extremis, results, of course, in death (PW 212). Buddhism with its valuation of nothingness as the highest good is a philosophical expression of this

pathological response (PW 233–4). The second, the inauthentic response, is evasion. One ‘neutralises’ the conflict either by clinging ever more ‘fanatically’ to one’s original worldview or by turning the stark ‘either-or’ of the antinomy into a fake ‘both-and’. So with respect, for instance, to existential guilt, one may try to evade responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions by appealing to Calvinist predestination in order to transfer guilt to God. And with respect to ‘struggle’, one might try to diffuse the antinomy by deceiving oneself into believing in ‘utopian pacifism’ (PW 228). All forms of utopianism, even Hegel’s, says Jaspers, are inauthentic (PW 215).

The third, the authentic, response to the limit situation is, through facing up to it, to ‘acquire power (*Kraft*)’, the power to create a new worldview (PW 214). The ‘hold’ provided by one’s former worldview has been shattered beyond recovery by its ‘contradiction’ in the limit situation. But one’s ‘lust for life’ (PW 218), the ‘overflowing’ creative forces contained within the ‘will to existence’ (PW 242), generates a new worldview. So, in the case of ‘struggle’, the authentic response is ‘affirm struggle and the will to struggle’, if not by adopting actual warfare as a way of life—the ancient Germanic tribes treated it as a kind of sport—then by committing oneself to the life of spiritual ‘agon’ (PW 228). (The idea of ‘affirming struggle’ again comes from Nietzsche, from his account of the ‘Dionysian god or man’ who, instead of seeking the ‘quiet, stillness, calm seas’ of the weak and evasive, accepts all ‘destruction, decomposition, negation’ because, out of ‘an overflow of procreating, fertilizing forces’, he knows that he can ‘turn any desert into bountiful farmland’ [*The Gay Science* sec. 370].)

In the case of the ‘contingency’ of the world, while recognising that objective meanings are indeed just ‘aesthetic anthropomorphisms’, one may ‘overcome’ the contradiction by seeing that this does not preclude one from constructing one’s own personal meaning. One may construct one’s own personal ‘destiny’—become, as Nietzsche puts it, the ‘poet’ of one’s life (*The Gay Science* sec. 299)—without any false pretence that one’s ‘destiny’ is anything other than one’s own creation (PW 240–1).

In the case of ‘guilt’, Jaspers follows Kierkegaard in regarding some form of a relation to the divine and to its expiation in a realm of ‘ultimate blessedness’ as essential to its overcoming (PW 245–7). And the authentic response to death is to ‘overcome’ it by articulating the healthy person’s deep-seated conviction in its impossibility. Whether this articulation takes the form of the Hindu doctrine of metempsychosis, the Christian doctrine of the immortal soul, or Goethe’s pantheism is immaterial: these are all metaphorical expressions—‘cyphers’, he will later say (pp. 56 below)—of the same inner certainty (PW 235–8).

Jaspers’ discussion of authenticity with respect to guilt and death reveals already the sharp divergence between his own at least quasi-religious existentialism and the atheistic existentialism of Sartre, Camus, and the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. From their perspective, doctrines of immortality are

inauthentic, evasions of the reality of death. For them, authenticity requires precisely the acceptance that the nothingness of death is a real nothingness.

The moment and the choice

The authentic response to the objective or subjective limit situation is, then, to use it as an occasion for the self-transformation that is the precondition of psychic 'growth' (PW 214). One cannot live without the 'hold' of a spiritual *Gehäuse*, and so, as a previous *Gehäuse* is destroyed, one is impelled to find a new one. The moments in which this happens are the crucial 'turning points' (PW 293) in the authentic life.

To elucidate the character of these turning points, Jaspers takes over Kierkegaard's notion of 'the Moment (*der Augenblick*)', the flash of insight in which something vital becomes visible. The Moment is, as Kierkegaard puts it, the appearance of the eternal in time. To stand in the Moment is to see one's life as a temporal totality, and hence, metaphorically, to stand outside time (PW 94–102). The Moment, says Jaspers, cannot be commanded. In the distress of a collapsed worldview one can prepare and hope for the Moment, but one cannot force it to happen. It must, rather, 'ripen' over time (PW 296). As Franz Neumann writes concerning the conflict between staying with his mother and devoting himself to science (p. 38 above), after a long period of doubt, the Moment that enabled him to decide for the latter came to him quite unexpectedly as he watched the sun setting over the evening fields: it appeared, he writes, 'in a flash without any contribution on my part, like an external voice, a voice outside of me that was utterly clear and intelligible'. The arrival of the Moment, says Jaspers, is, in Kierkegaard's word, a 'mystery'. It is experienced, as Nietzsche says, as 'something divine'. In religious language, it is a potential 'conversion' or 'rebirth' (PW 295).

One either acts on the revelation of the Moment or one does not. Since the revelation contains an element of fear, one may dismiss it as 'nothing', as a momentary and irrelevant interruption of normal, reasonable existence (PW 97–8). But since the old way of living has been fatally undermined, to do so is to condemn oneself to a 'mechanical' existence (PW 270): listlessly, one goes through the motions of a way of life that one once took seriously but which now seems hollow and trivial—a 'cage'. If, on the other hand, one 'seizes the moment'—but not in the manner of the *carpe diem* of the Epicureans (PW 99)—then one makes what Kierkegaard calls 'the leap (*der Sprung*)'. The 'either-or' stares one in the face, one resists the inauthentic pretence that it is a 'both-and', and then one 'leaps' to the new, to a new hierarchy of values, a new 'telos', a new 'self'. The leap, insists Jaspers, is essentially 'irrational'. It is based on nothing objective, nothing that could count as a reason. Even when reasons are offered they are no more than rationalisations of the irrational (or at least non-rational) decision. The choice is based on nothing but (Kierkegaardian)

‘seriousness’, the decision to take ‘responsibility’ for oneself and one’s hierarchy of values entirely on one’s own shoulders (PW 296–7).

Assessment

Psychology of Worldviews contains an important insight, one that stems from Jaspers’ background in psychiatry. There can be, I think, no question but that, out of fear of the unknown, human beings are disposed to cling—cling ‘fanatically’—to ways of living and judging that are misaligned with their real needs and desires, and, as a result, to live crippled lives. People do this individually and they do it collectively. One thinks of the lives and relationships in Northern Ireland ruined by the frozen antagonism between Catholics and Protestants, or in the Middle East by the frozen antagonism between Jews and Palestinians. As observed earlier, the psychosis of living within a frozen worldview is close to what Sartre famously calls ‘bad faith’. The pathology of bad faith was, however, worked out by Jaspers twenty years before Sartre, which helps explain Jaspers’ occasionally visible irritation at the association of modern existentialism exclusively with the name of Sartre (J 33). Important though Jaspers’ book is, however, it seems to me that it has two substantial failings, one concerning the notion of ‘becoming who you are’, the second concerning its self-declared ‘irrationalism’.

Becoming who you are. Jaspers suggests that the authentic life as he describes it is a life that answers to Nietzsche’s (originally Pindar’s) injunction to ‘become who you are’ (PW 84). In Nietzsche’s hands, the words are simply an elegant phrasing of the injunction to eliminate the gap between one’s actual and ideal self. Becoming who you are is engaging in a process of *Bildung*, of disciplined self-cultivation so that one grows into the person of one’s ideal. Sometimes, Jaspers speaks in a similar way: authenticity is a matter of spiritual ‘growth’ (PW 214), of progressing from lower to higher ‘niveaux’ of the self (PW 186, 297). Elsewhere, however, he explicitly excludes the organic metaphor. The ‘self-forming’ (*Selbstgestaltung*) of the authentic life is, he says, not a developmental process (*Bildungsprozess*), but only a change from one ‘state of consciousness’ to another (PW 88). That this is the view he is actually committed to is clear, given that an ideal self-projected at a given time must correspond to one’s value hierarchy of that time, a hierarchy that, with the supposedly everchanging flux of one’s needs and desires, must inevitably become outmoded and inauthentic.

There can be, then, no genuine ‘growth’ in the authentic life as conceived by Jaspers. Life cannot be a *Bildungsroman*. Instead, it can only be made up of a series of ‘life segments’ with no continuous thread connecting them together, a series of, as he indeed says, ‘rebirths’ (p. 40 above). This account of authenticity carries over into French existentialism. One of Camus’ ‘absurd heroes’ is ‘the actor’ who, in his lust for experience, lives like a stage actor who ‘for three hours’ is Gloucester and then, for another three, Iago.¹³ And for Sartre, too, the

knowledge that you are free, at every moment, to trade in an old personality for a radically new one is the essence of authenticity.¹⁴

It is certainly possible to live like Camus' 'actor'. Or at least to fantasise about such a life: Olympic athlete, then world-famous violinist, then CEO of a major corporation ... But it is hardly compulsory to adopt the actor's way of life as one's understanding of authenticity. And, in fact, it is clear that the life form in question has some distinctly unattractive features. One of these concerns love and friendship: as, like a snake shedding its skin, the 'actor' abandons his old self, so, presumably, he also abandons his so-called friends as no longer appropriate to his current life-segment. (Modern German uses the phrase *Lebensabschnittspartner*, 'life-segment-partner', when one wants to signal the absence of any long-term commitment to one's partner.) A related feature concerns responsibility. If there is no continuous self running through one's life, merely a succession of unrelated selves, then actions performed under one's name by a previous self are actions for which one's current self has no responsibility. One thinks of the murderer on death row who claims to have 'found Jesus' and so accepts no responsibility for the actions of the former self. French existentialism appeals to one's teenage years, but it is hard to see it as a basis on which to construct a social world—or, I shall suggest, a politics (pp. 69–70 below).

Irrationalism. Life, says Jaspers, 'is personal, irrational, and inescapable responsibility'. The crucial 'turning points' are all, to repeat, 'irrational' (PW 293). Camus alleges that there is a contradiction between Jaspers' 'destruction of reason' and his use of reason to 'explain the world',¹⁵ and, in a way, he is right. For why, after all, should we follow Jaspers' ideal of trading in an existing worldview for a new one when it comes into conflict with our current needs and desires? Because, given the goal of health and happiness, it would be *irrational* not to do so. Jaspers' account of the authentic life as a matter of constantly changing one's worldview to accommodate the data of 'intuitive' (PW 54 et passim) life bears some analogy to Thomas Kuhn's conception of scientific progress as occurring through a series of 'paradigm shifts' (although, of course, that there is no 'progress' in the Jaspersian life). And just as it is rational for science to search for a new paradigm when the old one is no longer functional, so the life form Jaspers recommends is recommended on the basis of (instrumental) rationality, of adopting the necessary means to a given end.

What, however, he really means to deny, in calling life irrational is not prudential but rather axiological rationality. All values are, he says, 'irrational' (PW 286)—by which he really means *non-rational*. Whether one recognises it or not, one is 'inescapably responsible' for one's values because they are grounded in nothing but one's own choice. One may appeal to reason or to God's command, to 'objective' or 'absolute' values, but this is an inauthentic evasion of one's own absolute responsibility for one's values and goals (ibid.) Fundamentally, therefore, what Jaspers means in claiming the values in which

any life is grounded to be irrational is that they are, in Sartre's sense, 'absurd'. My life, says Sartre, is 'absurd' because I am the 'foundationless foundation' of my values: 'Nothing', he continues, 'justifies me in adopting this or that value or this or that scale of values. As a being by whom values exist I am unjustifiable'.¹⁶ Sartre realised, however, as Jaspers does not, that to experience one's life as absurd is profoundly debilitating. If I, as a liberal democrat, know that my political values are based on nothing but my own ungrounded choice, then I can give no reason why my values are any better than those of the Marxist or Fascist totalitarian. And this undermines commitment: as Leo Strauss puts it, a commitment to values, political or otherwise, that is based solely on ungrounded choice can never be entirely 'wholehearted' (GTC II 198).

At one point, Jaspers comes close to noticing this. The authentic individual's turning to a new way of life is, he says, always an 'experiment': 'always a venture, an experimenting ... never a quiet possession' (PW 213). Given his admiration for Kierkegaard, it is surprising, however, that he does not attend to Kierkegaard's principal argument for theism, namely, that to avoid 'despair', we need to ground our values in an external authority, which, for him, can only be God. A life without such external justification is, says Kierkegaard, 'experimental', something that can be abandoned on a moment's notice. As such, it is a trivial and dissatisfied life lacking the 'seriousness'—wholeheartedness—of genuine commitment.¹⁷

To conclude. In Jaspers' early account, the authentic life has two features: there is no continuous self, no continuous set of values. Life is made up of a series of 'life segments'. And each of these segments is inhabited merely as an 'experiment'. Jaspers' authentic agent really is, then, an 'actor': at any moment, one is merely acting a part. Acting, however, is not living. Jaspers' early 'philosophy of life', one might well object, is not really philosophy of *life* at all.

Section II: Religious existentialism

Retrospectively, Jaspers described the three-volume *Philosophy*, which appeared in 1932, as the work 'closest to [his] heart' (P I 5). There are, it seems to me, two central contrasts between it and *Psychology of Worldviews*, each of which has its origin in biographical events that occurred in the twelve-year intermission between the two works.

Having been appointed to the chair of philosophy at Heidelberg in 1922, and recognising the somewhat amateurish philosophical background to *Psychology of Worldviews*, Jaspers decided that he needed to learn philosophy properly and undertook a 'serious study' of the subject of which he was now a professor (J 34). This turned out to be a study of German idealism, first and foremost, of Kant. The result of this is that although Kierkegaard is perhaps even more present in *Philosophy* than he was in *Psychology of Worldviews*, Heraclitus has disappeared completely, eclipsed by

Kant. Prominent in the earlier work (p. 36 above), Heraclitus receives not a single mention in *Philosophy*. The result of this displacement is a transformation of Jaspers' attitude towards time and nature. Whereas the flow of time and the everchanging nature of our drives and desires within it had been the metaphysical foundation of the earlier work, with the adoption of Kant's idealism, natural things become mere 'appearances (*Erscheinungen*)' and time no more than their 'form'. Reality 'in itself' lies beyond time and therefore beyond change. Thus, whereas *Psychology of Worldviews* presents a reality that is temporal, natural, and in flux, *Philosophy* presents a reality that is beyond time, nature, and change. A kind of philosophical stasis enters Jaspers' thought.

The second and related contrast concerns religion. *Psychology of Worldviews* is atheistic. It is not aggressively so in the manner of Camus, and it accepts that religious belief can provide an authentic response to the limit situations of guilt and death. But there is no exploration of religious belief and no commitment to its truth. *Philosophy*, by contrast, is philosophy of religion, an attempt to recover God—rechristened 'Being' or 'the Absolute'—in a manner that could be tenable in a world grown too sophisticated for the dogmatic 'objectification' that the divine receives in traditional theology.

To be worth anything, says Jaspers, philosophy must attend to what 'really matters' (P I 72), must attend to our deepest concerns, must, that is, be 'philosophy of life'. In a world overtaken by 'reason', by science and technology, he believes, what really matters is, in Weber's language, the re-enchantment of the world, the recovery of our sense of 'transcendence'. Philosophy must do this, he believes, via Kant. If it is to be anything other than an empty 'intellectual game' (P I 63), philosophy must awaken our sense of the mundane world as a world of 'appearances'. It must 'call objectivity into question', disrupt our naïve realism, by awakening our sense of the everyday as 'suspended (*Schwebend*)' within and 'encompassed' by the ultimately real (P II 295), an ultimate reality that 'transcends' rational, scientific, conceptual thought.

Jaspers was born into a secular environment; his father seems to have been a convinced atheist. At the time of writing *Psychology of Worldviews*, Jaspers had, he says, no interest in theology, save for a psychologist's interest in it as a 'symptom' of a psychological state. In the mid-1920s, however, a Catholic priest made him aware that, without him being fully conscious of it, his lectures had become a kind of 'theology'. This redirection of his thought, he says, was primarily due to his wife Gertrude, who had 'transformed the Orthodox Jewish faith in herself into biblically grounded philosophising' and whose personality and life were 'permeated by religious reverence' (J 77–8). *Philosophy*, Jaspers records, was created out of prolonged and intense dialogues with his wife, whom he effectively acknowledges as the co-author of the work (J 39). The contrast between the a-theism of *Psychology of Worldviews* and the

non-doctrinal theism of *Philosophy* is thus primarily due to the influence of Gertrude Meyer.

Existence and Existenz

Existence (*Dasein*) is existence in the world. The world, the totality of all that 'exists', is that which is revealed to us in everyday, practical consciousness. Our being in the world consists in the ceaseless effort to satisfy our many drives. Some things attract us, others we mark as 'dangers' and seek to avoid. Above all, we seek to avoid death. Natural science is the deployment of theory in the service, ultimately, of this technological end (P I 51–4).

Naturalism (as opposed to supernaturalism) is the view that 'existence' is the totality of what is. Such a worldview, says Jaspers, impoverishes our lives. We experience a vague discontent of obscure origin which generates a 'will to know (*Wissenwollen*)', the yearning for a kind of knowledge different in kind from that which science can provide, knowledge that will give 'meaning' to our life (P II 7–9). (We are born, said Pascal, with a 'God-shaped' hole in the heart.)

Discontent (Kierkegaardian 'despair') is the beginning of the personal transformation that Jaspers seeks to facilitate. It is the beginning of one's 'Existenz (*Existenz*)', of, in the language of *Psychology of Worldviews*, one's 'authentic' existence. 'Existenz'¹⁸ is, first and foremost, 'freedom'. If one views oneself from within the scientific perspective, one appears as an 'empirical' object among objects, one whose behaviour, like that of every other object, is subject to causal determinism. In the case of humans, causal determinants are called 'motives', and it is these that are studied by the science of psychology. As Kant teaches us, however, the world of existence is a 'phenomenal' world of mere 'appearances'. In the 'transcendent' world of 'true being' (P II 312), however, one is free. Officially, of course, Kant only says that, in the unknowable world of the 'in itself', freedom *might* be found. But, says Jaspers, freedom is not, for Kant, a mere hypothesis. It is a subjective certainty, a resolute 'faith', which it is the purpose of his transcendental idealism to articulate. This is a faith which we both can and need to share. We begin to do this in moments of extreme 'solitude', moments of disengagement in which we confront our world as a 'stranger'. In such moments, we become a 'pure eye' that grasps the world as a totality that does not include our real self (P II 180). If, then, the 'true self (*eigentlich Selbst*)' (P I 57) is not in the world of existence—as the eye is not in the visual field¹⁹—it must have its existence, or rather Existenz, outside of the world. (This transformation of Kant's transcendental self into a transcendent self occurs four years earlier in Scheler's *Man's Place in Nature*, which may have influenced Jaspers [GTC II 158–9].) There is, of course, no 'scientific' proof of this free and transcendent self (here, Jaspers is more circumspect than Scheler), and so belief in it cannot be the result of rational 'deliberation'. Yet we all have subjective certainty of freedom, have, as it is sometimes called, the 'feeling

of freedom'. In order to overcome the discontent of life in a world without 'transcendence', what we can and should do is to make the Kierkegaardian 'leap' beyond the demand for scientific proof, beyond the life of reason, and endorse that feeling as insight into the way true being really is.

Having made the leap, one 'soars' into the realm of freedom, the realm of the 'metaphysical' (P I 57)—the meta-physical. (One thinks of the regrown wings of the soul of the Platonic lover.) The temptation exists to remain in this condition that is perforce one of 'solitude', to detach oneself permanently from the affairs of a troubled world. But this is not really an option because one knows that, while not a *merely* worldly being, one *is* a worldly being—so that a permanent detachment would quickly amount to death.²⁰ And so, having experienced my Existenz, I return to life, to 'existence', in a transformed state. I know, or rather have subjective certainty, that I am free, that I am not the creation of my circumstances, and that therefore I can and must 'create myself', *choose* what my life is to be (P II 179–82).

Although Jaspers' distinction between existence and Existenz claims to be inspired by Kant, his account of freedom is different from Kant's. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the natural world contains *no* exceptions to the principle of universal causality, which has made it a perpetual struggle for Kant scholars to make sense of the formula 'noumenal freedom but phenomenal determinism'. Jaspers' position is less puzzling because he simply denies the universality of causal determinism: although I am indeed 'subject to causality' (I cannot fly unaided, for instance),

where I am my own origin, everything has not yet been settled, in principle, according to general laws. It is not only due to the infinity of conditions that I do not know how it might be On a quite different plane, it is still my own self that decides what is.

(P I 56)

We perform 'conditioned' actions which are the product of psychological causes (I eat *because* I am hungry) but also 'unconditioned' ones that are not (P II 255–6).²¹ Unconditioned actions are, says Jaspers, the product of the 'authentic' rather than the 'empirical' (P I 54) self. The picture, then, is a Cartesian rather than Kantian one. Mostly, the affairs of the empirical world run along causal lines. On crucial occasions, however, there are interventions in the causal order that originate in the 'transcendent': as Daniel Dennett calls them, 'skyhooks'.

Boundary situations

All of us, says Jaspers, possess 'possible Existenz'. The authentic life is one which actualises this possibility, which realises its own 'transcendence' of

existence—albeit within existence. What is it that initiates this process of actualisation? Jaspers' answer marks the reappearance of his signature concept, the *Grenzsituation*, which, for reasons I shall come to shortly, I shall now translate as 'boundary situation' rather than 'limit situation'. I 'come to myself', he writes, only in boundary situations (P I 84, III 61): 'To experience boundary situations is the same as Existenz' (P II 179).

In existential 'solitude', we saw (p. 46 above), we disengage from the world. For a moment, we lose our 'situatedness' within it. But in everyday existence, says Jaspers, we are always in a 'situation'. My situation is my worldly location. As a spatio-temporal being, I stand within a network of relations to the other beings with which I share the world. Not all of these, however, belong to my 'situation': to do so they must be of actual or potential 'interest' to me (P II 177). Some aspects of my situation, my 'factuality', are 'confining' (ibid.): my parentage, native nationality, and the historical epoch within which I live are facts about me I can do nothing about (P I 254). What Heidegger and Sartre call my 'facticity' is thus part, but not the whole, of my 'situation' since, in other respects, my situation allows me 'leeway' (P II 177): the leeway, of course, within which 'unconditioned' actions can occur (P I 254).

What is it that distinguishes boundary situations from situations in general? Situations, writes Jaspers, 'are either universal and typical [of humanity as such] or else historically determined and unique' (P II 177). In *Psychology of Worldviews*, we saw (pp. 37–8 above), this distinction carries over to *Grenzsituationen*: a *Grenzsituation* may depend on the unique psychology and circumstances of an individual or it may be universal to all humanity. In *Philosophy*, however, *Grenzsituationen* specific to individual circumstances drop out of consideration. The concept of a boundary situation appears now to be confined to those that are universal to all human beings, those that can thus be considered 'philosophical' rather than merely psychological. Or at least, Jaspers' interest in boundary situations is now confined to those that are universal.

As before, boundary situations are the product of the 'antinomic' structure of human existence, the disjunction between the will and the world, a disjunction that cannot be overcome by 'planning and calculation', so that in the end, calculative reason 'can do nothing but surrender to them' (P II 179). As conditions of suffering, or at least anxiety, boundary situations thus present us with the 'questionable (*fragwürdig*)' nature of the world and of our life within it. They raise the question of 'why there is existence at all' given that existence is something a perfect god would necessarily be without (P II 221). Notice the darkening of Jaspers' mood, a darkening evidently connected with his theological turn and perhaps with the distressing conditions of inter-war Germany: while the 'questionableness' of existence is mentioned (once) in *Psychology of Worldviews*, it there has the sense of 'problematic'. There is no hint of the Schopenhauerian view that existence is actually something we would be better off without.

Boundary situations are *boundary* situations, Jaspers now says, because they prompt, in Kierkegaard's language, the 'leap to faith'. They prompt us to realise that there 'must' be something beyond our questionable existence,²² that existence does not constitute the totality of our being: 'the word "boundary" (*Grenz*)' means "there is something Other (*ein Anderes*)," but this Other is not available to a [mere] existing consciousness' (P II 178–9). (This is the reason I have changed the translation of *Grenzsituation* from 'limit situation' to 'boundary situation'. In *Psychology of Worldviews*, a *Grenzsituation* is one in which one realised that one's worldview has reached its 'limit', is no longer fit to purpose [p. 37 above]. Although one needs to find another worldview, there is no guarantee that one will: there is no guarantee that there is anything beyond the 'limit'. For there to be a 'boundary', by contrast, there must be something beyond the boundary.) In *Psychology of Worldviews*, we saw, Jaspers discusses four universal boundary situations, struggle, death, contingency, and guilt. In *Philosophy*, he discusses five: historicity, death, suffering, struggle, and guilt. Historicity, he calls the 'first' boundary situation (P II 183) and the others, 'specific' boundary situations (P II 193). It is not entirely clear what this distinction amounts to, but I shall assume that the specific situations are intended as specific aspects of the 'first', or general, situation.

Historicity. Jaspers uses 'historical' as Heidegger uses 'facticity' to refer not just to one's historical location, but to the totality of facts about one that one cannot change. He claims that historicity, facticity as such, is a boundary situation. The 'antinomy' in question appears to be between our desire for the freedom to explore all life possibilities and the limitations imposed by our particular facticity which both confine us and are experienced as 'confinement' (P II 185). The 'solution' to the antinomy is that in ascending to Existenz, in experiencing the situation as a *boundary* situation, one has an experience of transcendent 'being', and of one's historical 'destiny' as something 'destined' to one by 'being itself'. With this experience, one is able to treat one's facticity as if it were the product of one's own will, to 'take it up as mine' and, in Nietzsche's language, to *amor fati*, to love my 'fate' (P II 189–92). As to why transcendence should have this effect I shall have a suggestion to make in discussing the boundary situation of 'suffering' (p. 49 below).²³

Death. Mortality is a boundary situation, says Jaspers, because it 'contradicts' the innate 'will to live', which explains our 'vital fear of death'. Fear of death, he says, is double-aspected: we fear the death of a loved one and we fear our own death. In each case, the fear is fear of loneliness: when the death is one's own, one goes into it alone, when the death is that of the beloved, one is left alone (P II 194).

What is 'crucial' about the boundary situation of death, however, is one's own death. One can evade it by making it the concern of a future rather than present 'self': one can, as Sartre puts it, live under 'the illusion of eternity'.²⁴ And one can fail to make productive use of the situation by yielding to

'nihilistic despair' in the face of 'objective annihilation'. One can resolve the situation, however, only through the transcendence that comes with Existenz, through realising one's being in time is not the totality of one's being. Transcendence also provides a consolation for the death of a beloved: one realises that 'communication' with the beloved is not terminated by death (P II 193–201).

Suffering. In the boundary situation of 'suffering'—Jaspers seems to have in mind suffering of a non-human origin—one comes face to face with the inseparability of life from suffering, both mental and physical. As the Buddhists emphasise, *Leben ist Leiden*. I can cover over the inescapability of suffering by thinking in utopian terms about biology and medicine, by self-deception over what ails me in my own case, or by blocking out the suffering of others. Raised to the level of Existenz, however, one will 'adopt' suffering—as part, presumably, of the *amor fati* with which one receives one's historical facticity in general. One is able to do this because one 'soars in the boundary situation to the experience of knowing [oneself] as one with transcendence'. One becomes at one with the origin of all things (see p. 50 below), a condition in which suffering acquires an 'uncomprehended meaning' (P II 20–4). (This may be a version of Kierkegaard's account of Abraham's 'religious consciousness', of his 'suspension' of the demand to understand why God commands him to murder his own son. As William Cowper's hymn puts it, 'Judge not the Lord by feeble sense / But trust him for his grace / Behind a frowning providence / He hides a smiling face'.)

Struggle. The boundary situation of 'struggle (*Kampf*)' (P II 204–15) confronts one with the inseparability of life and struggle, with the fact that one cannot live without conflict. One might seek to evade the situation via one of two 'pseudo-solutions': one might indulge in the 'utopian notion' that a 'correct organisation' of human society can in principle eliminate human conflict, or one might (in the manner of Carl Schmitt [GTC II 180]) validate 'conflict for conflict's sake, fighting as such, no matter what the cause and the objective'. The solution to the boundary situation, however, is the transformation of violent into 'loving' struggle, the kind of *agon* that only comes about when 'Existenz touches Existenz'—when we realise our underlying fellowship within the unity of the transcendent origin, of 'Existenz in the One' (P II 218). (There are affinities, here, with Martin Buber's notion that the mutual affirmation of the I–thou relation dissolves objectively irresolvable conflict [p. 152 below].)

Guilt. Much as in *Psychology of Worldviews*, I inhabit the boundary situation of 'guilt' when I see that I cannot realise positive value without also realising negative value. I cannot promote culture without accepting exploitation (p. 38 above). (Jaspers seems to have forgotten about machines, but it is, of course, generally true that one cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs.) Purity of soul is impossible. I may try to evade the situation by, for example, pretending that the law eliminates exploitation. In

Existenz, however, I abandon all attempts to evade guilt. 'For Existenz in the boundary situation ... I am myself, but guilt-laden. It is not a matter of guiltlessness, any more, but of really avoiding whatever guilt I can avoid' (P II 215–8). Why Existenz should overcome the questionableness of existence that is raised by all boundary situations must again rest on the *amor fati* with which the authentic person responds to the historical situation in general. Guilt 'must' have a meaning though it be incomprehensible to the human intellect.

Metaphysics

'In essence', writes Jaspers, 'the philosophy of Existenz is metaphysics' (P I 67). Since, as we know, Existenz entails 'transcendence', it is clear that Jaspers does not think of metaphysics as P. F. Strawson's 'descriptive metaphysics', as a description of the structure of everyday experience. Rather, he is using 'metaphysics' in the manner of the Romantics to mean 'meta-physics', the gaining of access to that which lies 'above' the 'physical', that which lies beyond everyday existence and experience. Existenz is not, however, the 'final goal' of metaphysics. That final goal is not our own transcendence but rather *the* transcendent, the unifying 'One' that is the 'origin' of all things. Realising our own transcendence is thus only a stepping stone to sensing the One: metaphysics wants transcendence to 'dissolve' into the transcendent (*ibid.*). Thinking in terms of the image of a sphere, Jaspers calls this ultimate One 'the Encompassing' (J 792), a One that surrounds the mundane world on all sides.

The Encompassing, that is to say 'Being', cannot be known. It cannot even be properly thought: 'no sooner does it come into view than it dissolves again'. This is because while the intellect can grasp only beings, Being is not a being. Though it cannot be known, cannot be made an object of the intellect, encompassing Being can, nonetheless, be sensed, can become an object of 'intuition' (J 791). How so?

To someone imprisoned in mere existence, the world of objects is what there is: the real consists of objects and nothing else. But to someone who has achieved Existenz, objects become 'symbols' of 'the absolute' (a notion, we shall see, that reappears in Tillich), 'objectifications' of something non-objective. As, for instance, a heart symbolises love, so metaphysical symbols bring the Encompassing to presence. Symbols combine into a 'second language', a language above that of factual communication, a language of 'cyphers'. Or rather, they combine into a multiplicity of second languages, because the medium in which the Encompassing comes to presence varies according to culture and individual. In ancient Greece, for instance, the gods were its symbols: as the ocean symbolises the unfathomable, so the sea-god did as well. Ethical traditions are apprehensions of the Absolute and so, too, is metaphysical philosophy: the real function of Schelling's 'will' or Hegel's 'reason' is to give symbolic

expression to something that lies beyond philosophy. Art, too, expresses the ‘all-encompassing’: in a van Gogh landscape (or starry sky), the ‘mystical’ comes to presence. In a word, Existenz renders existence numinous. Hegel understood the role of metaphysics in revealing the numinous when he referred to his philosophy as a ‘divine service’ (P III 118–24).

What is the relation between the self of Existenz and the Encompassing? The self, says Jaspers, is not a substance. Rather, it is an ‘original power’ that ‘echoes’ in the ‘individual historical decisions of one’s own existence’ (J 829–30). The power in question is, however, supra-personal. For as we have seen, the ultimate power behind everything is the Encompassing: in Existenz, individuality ‘dissolves’ into the One (p. 50 above).

Thus, in short compass, the philosophy of *Philosophy*. I propose now to attempt a deeper understanding of it by considering a number of difficulties and objections.

The absurdity objection

The core of the existence–Existenz contrast is freedom. According to the third-person perspective of science, events in the world, including human actions, are causally determined. There is no freedom. From the first-person perspective, on the other hand, we believe that we are free. We have, to repeat, the ‘feeling of freedom’. We believe that, at least sometimes, we are the uncaused causes of new causal sequences, performers of ‘actions’ in Arendt’s sense of the word (note 21). According to Jaspers, the first-person view is correct—or is, at least, the perspective he recommends we adopt (I shall return to this issue). The ‘authentic self’ is free: the feeling of freedom is the disclosure of our ‘possible Existenz’. Actual Existenz is acting out of the freedom of the authentic self. It is the resolution to ‘be myself’ in my existence, to act out of ‘the original necessity of my authentic self’ (P II 158). But what is it to do that?

‘Existential’ freedom, is not, says Jaspers, freedom from constraints, not the freedom to indulge in ‘caprice (*Willkür*)’. It is, in fact, the opposite of such ‘arbitrariness’ because it consists in the following of ‘norms’. (It is, then, in terms of the distinction articulated by Isaiah Berlin, ‘positive’ rather than ‘negative’ freedom.) These norms, however, are not social conventions; they are not ‘objective imperatives’. Or at least, their authority does not derive from society. The norms I follow as an authentically free Existenz are valid for me because they are ‘identical with myself’ (P II 154–6).

I observed earlier that *Psychology of Worldviews* seemed to be vulnerable to the ‘absurdity’ objection that can be raised against existentialism in general: if ‘existence precedes essence’, if there is no pre-given ‘essence’ in which to ground my life, if, on the contrary, my essence is the product of my free, ungrounded choice, then my life is ‘absurd’ in the sense that there is no way I can regard my choice of myself as any better than anyone else’s choice of their self. The consequence

is that in situations of 'struggle'—which, recall, Jaspers takes to belong to the essence of life—my commitment to my own choice cannot be 'wholehearted' (pp. 43 above). Heidegger and Husserl are not vulnerable to this objection because they hold that thanks to the formal and informal *Bildung* (enculturation) I receive in virtue of being born into a particular lifeworld, the fundamental norms that constitute my authentic self are ones which, as I arrive at adulthood, I find myself 'already in' (p. 22 above). For them, acting out of one's own fundamental norms and acting out of the *fundamental* norms of one's community are one and the same because the foundations of the self are socially constructed. The question we need to ask concerning Jaspers is: Are the norms of Existenz norms that I find myself 'already in'? If so, *Philosophy* represents an advance over *Psychology of Worldviews* in that it overcomes the absurdity objection.

This question takes us to Jaspers' discussion of 'tradition'. The authentic self is, he says, one's own creation (P II 58). But one does not create the self *ex nihilo*. Rather, one cannot but create the self out of the materials provided by one's historical situation, a situation, which, importantly, includes the ethical tradition of one's community. And so perforce, self-creation is creation within a tradition, creation that occurs in 'communication' with others who belong to the same tradition. On the other hand, as a free being, one cannot have tradition simply poured into one as if one were a 'vessel'. Rather, tradition is something such that one becomes oneself only by 'taking possession (*ergreifen*)' of it (P II 52). The crucial question is what 'taking possession' ('assimilating' as the translation puts it) amounts to.

Jaspers repeatedly emphasises that the authentic life cannot be abstract 'legality', the 'mechanical' application of general rules or norms to particular historical situations. Rather, the 'substance' of legality must be determined by the particular situation itself (P II 157). This is the point developed at length by Gadamer in his discussion of legal hermeneutics: the application of a general principle to a particular situation requires interpretation, which is an art that cannot be reduced to a 'mechanical' science (GTC I 174–7). Is this, then, Jaspers' account of 'taking possession of' the norms of an ethical tradition? Is his point that, while the fundamental norms of that tradition are ones that I am 'already in', applying those norms requires that I creatively interpret what they mean for me in my current 'situation'?

Finding an answer to this question is not without its difficulties. But ultimately, it seems clear that this is not Jaspers' view. For first, although Jaspers talks a great deal about the importance of 'communication', in the end, it is not a decisive factor in determining one's self-creation. Though who I am to be is influenced by 'deliberation', it is not the product of such deliberation but rather (as with Kierkegaard's Abraham) a 'leap' beyond reasons (P II 159): 'nothing ... in the world can give me any [decisive?] reasons for my decision' (P II 9). Moreover, although the authentic person generally seeks to 'translate' tradition into their present situation, they must, as authentic, 'dare to be without any fixed form of tradition' (P II 26). Once one has risen to Existenz one

wants the being one is to be entirely 'one's own choice and responsibility' (P II 160). And so, in the end, it seems, Jaspers' position in *Philosophy* is the same 'existence-before-essence' position subscribed to in *Psychology of Worldviews* and, as such, remains vulnerable to the 'absurdity' objection.

Beyond reason

As noted, the framework on which the philosophy of *Philosophy* is constructed is Kant's distinction between the world of nature and a world beyond nature. Regarding ourselves as merely 'existing', we are objects among other objects in a world of universal causal determinism, the world of science. Psychology is the application of universal determinism to the particular case of human behaviour: from its point of view, our actions are the causal product of 'motives'. The perspective of science is, however, limited. And when we take into account this second world, a world of which it knows nothing, we see that, in reality, we are free.

What, for Jaspers, is the status of this account of things? What is the status of the philosophy of *Philosophy*? Is it an account of the way things really are, or merely the phenomenology of a form of consciousness which he recommends we try to adopt as a kind of therapy for the conflicted nature of our existence?

Existential freedom is not, says Jaspers, an object of scientific knowledge: 'what appears free in my arbitrary consciousness will appear to the natural science of psychology as nothing but the subjective mirroring of causal processes' (P I 92), an epiphenomenon whose content corresponds to nothing in reality. The 'absolute consciousness' that provides us with the 'assurance' of both freedom and the Encompassing (P II 223) will be dismissed by psychology as mere fantasy. 'Objectively', there is no freedom. On the other hand, 'man as Existenz knows he is free' (P I 92). This philosophy of freedom, he says, cannot be tested by the intellect since it consists precisely in the 'leap' beyond reason: it 'transcend[s] logic' (P I 94).

But, in the end, is not the rational point of view the one to which we are compelled to give epistemic priority? Not so, says Jaspers. All struggles are struggles of 'faith (*Glaube*)'—faith that it is one's own worldview, or one's own method of inquiry, rather than that of one's opponent, that has access to the truth: science and logic are themselves based on faith (P I 263–4). (In *Psychology of Worldviews*, he claims that the principle of non-contradiction is beyond 'proof', a 'faith' just like faith in a fatherland [PW 299]. Given that the principle is a condition of *saying* anything at all, a rule without which there is no meaningful assertion, to say that it is a 'faith' is like saying that the off-side rule in soccer is a 'faith'.)

Is there, then, simply a standoff between 'existential' and rational consciousness? Not so, says Jaspers, for it is only by adopting the point of view of his 'philosophical faith' (J 777)—the 'godless theology' that, as we shall see in

chapter 4, is close to (but better expressed in) Tillich's theology—that we can overcome discontent and despair in the face of the 'antinomies' of existence. Since reason and faith are both 'faiths', there is no decisive epistemological ground for choosing between them, for choosing between intuition and reason, freedom and determinism. It is simply a matter of making a fundamental choice. But the philosophy of Existenz is the philosophy we need if we are to avoid living in despair.

Jaspers claims that he is misunderstood if he is categorised as an 'irrationalist' (P I 15), and in a way he is right. The rationality of his philosophy is not, however, evidential but rather, as earlier observed, instrumental. Rationally speaking, we ought to share in his philosophical faith, not because we have any reason to believe its claims are true but because it will make us less unhappy. (This, of course, raises the question that afflicts many forms of fideism, the question of whether we *can* choose to believe something just because it would make us happy.)

* * *

Camus calls Jaspers 'the apostle of humiliated thought': the humiliation not just of reason but of humanity itself, given that it is reason that makes us who we are, distinguishes us from the rest of nature. His 'leap' beyond reason is thus a form of 'philosophical suicide'. As such, it disgusts Camus. Jaspers' and Kierkegaard's 'mutilation of the soul' is an offence against human dignity and 'pride'.²⁵

Of itself, this is not an argument against Jaspers. Perhaps human reason, perhaps the Enlightenment—Habermas' 'unfinished project of modernity'—is precisely what needs humiliating. Camus' point can, however, be developed into an argument by comparing Jaspers' 'death of God' theology with the death of God theology implicit in the later Heidegger.

Like Jaspers' 'Encompassing', Heidegger's 'Being' cannot be grasped in everyday language, the language of beings. Being is not a being, which, given that the substantival form of 'Being' suggests that it is, sometimes moves Heidegger to adopt the expedient of writing 'Being (*Sein*)' with a crossing-out through it.²⁶ Like Jaspers' Encompassing, Heidegger's 'Being' is an 'origin (*Ursprung*)', the unnameable source of all things.²⁷ And as with Jaspers, the authentic self of the later Heidegger is a self that is submerged in the origin, a self through whom the origin's 'venture' realises itself in the world (see further pp. 128–30 below). The difference, however, between the two expressions of a 'philosophical faith' is that, in Heidegger—contrary to the notion that his later philosophy degenerates into a woolly kind of mysticism—there is no 'humiliation of thought' at all. Rather, there is a confluence, a confluence of, as he puts it, *Dichten* and *Denken*, 'poetry' and 'thought'.²⁸ Although Heidegger's later style of writing is a kind of prose poetry that evokes the awesomeness

of the origin, it is simultaneously used to express hard, rigorous—rational—thought. What Heidegger provides, as Jaspers does not, is a reasoned argument that plays the role of a natural theology. Whereas for Jaspers, the ‘transcendent’ is an object of ‘intuition’ and hope, for Heidegger, it is an object of ‘intuition’ and reason.

What I am calling Heidegger’s natural theology is his analysis of truth. (The following is a highly abbreviated summary of that analysis. A fuller account of the argument can be found at GTC I 134–6 and 232–5. A somewhat obscure attempt to reproduce the argument can be found in Derrida’s *Différance*). Truth, Heidegger accepts, is, as the tradition holds, correspondence to the facts. But to determine which facts are relevant to determining the truth or falsity of a particular assertion one needs to know the relevant ‘horizon of disclosure’, the relevant, as Nietzsche calls it, ‘perspective’. To assess the truth value of, for instance, my claim that ‘You’ll never bathe in that again’, pointing to the river, you need to know whether I am talking about ordinary objects like rivers (talking within the ordinary-object ‘horizon’) or whether—sharing Heraclitus’ taste for paradox—I am talking about the material stuffs of which those objects are composed (talking within the material stuffs ‘horizon’): you will, of course, never bathe again in that exact body of water before our eyes right now. Now horizons of disclosure need to ‘conceal’ alternative horizons, for otherwise statements are ambiguous and cannot be assessed for truth: if I do not know whether you are talking within the object or material stuff horizon I do not know whether your claim is true or false. When we take into account future generations of humanity whose modes of cognition are very different from our own, as well as the possibility of non-human intellects, we see that there is no limit to the number of possible ways in which the real can be rendered intelligible. Behind, then, our way of illuminating the real lies the awesomeness of ‘the mystery’, of the unlimited modes of intelligibility, each revealing aspects of the real, that are unintelligible to us: ‘the mystery’ as Heidegger calls it. A further, crucial point is this: intelligibility as such we cannot create. For to create a horizon of intelligibility (Newtonian physics for instance), we would need to already possess a horizon within which to plan and execute the creative act. Intelligibility as such—our finding ourselves in an intelligible environment—is, therefore, something we *receive*, something ‘sent’ to us from out of the mystery. Actually, however, since to a healthy intellect, life, and hence the intelligible world, is something precious, we should regard the ‘light’ of intelligibility as not merely ‘sent’ but as ‘gifted’ to us, to which the appropriate response is ‘gratitude’. Properly conducted, says Heidegger, *Denken ist Danken*, thinking is thanking: ‘insofar as we think in the most serious way, we give thanks’ (GA 8 149–52)—thanks for ‘the wonder that around us a world worlds, that there is something rather than nothing, that there are things, and we ourselves are in their midst’ (GA 52 64).

What Heidegger offers, then, in addition to his evocation of Jaspers' Encompassing in his (or very often Hölderlin's and Rilke's) poetic words, is a route to it via rigorous rationality. What this shows, I suggest, is that there is no need for the Kierkegaardian 'leap' beyond reason, no need for Jaspers' 'humiliation of reason', no need for his amputation of our most distinctive attribute. How much more compelling, then, is an affirmation of Existenz—Heidegger calls it 'ecstasy' in the sense of 'ex-stasis', a 'standing out from' our everyday selves²⁹—that can be made with our whole being rather than with a 'mutilated' soul.

A further difference between Heidegger and Jaspers concerns the origins of their respective theologies. As with Kierkegaard, Jaspers' theology arises from suffering, from the alleged 'questionableness' of life. It is the product of what Schopenhauer (famous for his view that suffering renders life worthless) calls the 'metaphysical need', the need for a 'solution' to the tormenting 'riddle' of life. Jaspers' theology is a theology of need, a theology that has its roots in Kierkegaard's grim Lutheranism. How much more satisfying, however, is the world-affirming theology of 'gratitude' that arises out of Heidegger's (much attenuated) Catholicism.³⁰

Jaspers, we saw, makes the torment of the boundary situation the *exclusive* path to Existenz (p. 49 above). But this is a mistake. Heideggerian (and Aristotelian) 'wonder', the wonder that a 'world worlds', which leads us to give thanks to the ineffable, can arise in all sorts of circumstances: in experiencing love, music, poetry, or the nature that 'stirs and strives and enthrals us as landscape' (BT 70): Jaspers himself mentions the sense of unity with nature as a 'cypher' in which we read the presence of the numinous (J 789). There is nothing 'needy' in any of these encounters with the ineffable.

* * *

A final difficulty with Jaspers' theology of metaphysical comfort is that there seems very little it offers us other than comfort. Traditional religion not only provides comfort in the face of death but also tells us how to live. And Jaspers claims that his 'philosophical faith' does the same, or at least has the effect of 'transforming' one's life (P I 1 et passim). But if we ask what difference the ascension from existence to Existenz makes to our lives, the answer seems to be: not much. We perhaps feel better about our own mortality, are able to face death with a certain 'equanimity' (P II 199), but that seems to be the total effect. For all the vigorous talk about decision and action, the philosophy of *Philosophy* seems in the end to be a kind of Stoic quietism, a retreat from action and the world. And as a quasi-Stoicism, it is essentially a philosophy of passivity. Without argument, that is to say, the ideas that we might one day be able to end at least the worst forms of human conflict, that we might be able to perform actions that have no negative consequences, that medical advance might one day be able to eliminate bodily pain, are dismissed as inauthentic

evasions of the boundary situation. Jaspers values, to be sure, the intimate world of soul-to-soul ‘communication’ between friends and lovers, but any kind of attempt at public, world-transforming action is regarded as futile and condemned as an evasion of the essentially ‘questionable’ character of life. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Georg Lukács scorns the anti-political philosophy of *Philosophy*, describing it as ‘aristocratic’, petit-bourgeois individualism.³¹

A more charitable interpretation is to describe it as a philosophy of ‘inner emigration’. And since the Jaspers would soon have a life of inner emigration forced upon them by the Nazis, it is perhaps as well that they had a philosophical comfort to hand. After the war, as we are about to see, Jaspers abandoned inner emigration for an active role in German political life. But even so, his political engagement did not prevent him from emigrating to Switzerland. The theme of emigration runs through to the end of his life.

Section III: After the war

After his death, Jaspers sank into obscurity. But from 1945 until his death in 1969, he was a well-known public intellectual. With the ever-loyal Hannah Arendt vigorously promoting translations of his works in the United States, he achieved an international standing similar to that of Sartre or Bertrand Russell. Within Germany, his books regularly topped the bestseller lists: as one of the few German philosophers untainted by Nazism, he became, almost singlehandedly, as Nathan Wallace puts it, ‘the teacher of Germany’.³² Nearly all of Jaspers’ postwar writings are concerned with the politics of the times. The one exception is *The Origin and Goal of History* in which Jaspers proposed the thesis that the period from about the eighth to the third century BCE was an ‘axial age’, a kind of pause (or limit situation) between the passing of old certainties and the arrival of new ones that happened almost simultaneously in all the great world cultures, during which all of them saw the flourishing of free and creative thought. Because it is an historical rather than philosophical thesis I shall say no more about it. Instead, I shall focus on the two principal postwar works, *The Question of German Guilt* and *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Mankind*.

At first sight, Jaspers’ postwar writings appear to be written by a different person from the prewar existentialist. There are three salient contrasts between the two bodies of work. The first is that the later works are less opaque than the earlier ones. Like Camus, we have seen, Jaspers always rejected the reduction of philosophy to an academic ‘game’ (p. 44 above). Yet his earlier works were written, if not for a purely professional audience, at least for a highly educated one. The later works, by contrast, are written for everyone, are the works of a public intellectual. This was required by Jaspers’ new philosophy of philosophy. If the public complains that it finds philosophy incomprehensible, he writes, that is the philosopher’s fault, not theirs. It is the task of philosophy

to find a 'human language' accessible to all. To write in 'academic' language intelligible only to academics demonstrates the 'unseriousness' of the writer (FM 10).

The second contrast is that whereas the prewar works are about the individual—the individual's relation to his or her own life and, in *Philosophy*, to God—the later works are about the social, more specifically, the political.

The third, and most startling, contrast concerns 'reason'. The prewar works present themselves as defiantly 'irrational': authenticity, we saw, depends on reasonless 'decision', on one or more Kierkegaardian 'leaps' beyond the rational. The postwar works, by contrast, are a panegyric to 'reason', Being's unique 'gift' to humanity (FM 338) and our only hope for the future. As we shall see, however, Jaspers' use of 'reason' is highly idiosyncratic, in part, at least, simply a rechristening of 'Existenz'. Heidegger spoke of a radical 'turning' that separated his own later from his earlier work. But, I will suggest, there is no such turning in Jaspers' philosophy. It is true that the central concern of the later works, the defence of liberal democracy, does not appear in the earlier works. But it turns out that the defence of democracy consists in the claim that it is the only political system compatible with the existential 'freedom' that constitutes the human 'essence' (FM 298). Although not as visible in the later works as in the earlier, existentialism remains the foundation of Jaspers' thought throughout his career. When Sartre became a Marxist, he had to abandon his former existentialism, which he condemned as a 'disgrace'. With Jaspers, on the other hand, I shall suggest, his later political views are consistent with, indeed an application of, his existentialism.

Jaspers' political development 1945–69

Jaspers' postwar political thought moved in a steadily leftward direction, though his abhorrence of the Soviet Union—like Arendt, he found communist totalitarianism as repugnant as the fascist version—and insistence on the necessity of American leadership of the Western alliance during the Cold War placed an absolute limit to that movement. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, he supported the centre-right Christian Democratic Party and its leader, Konrad Adenauer, who, in 1949, became the first postwar German chancellor. He approved of both Adenauer's staunch Christianity and his opposition to Prussian domination of German life. In 1948, however, the Jaspers emigrated to Switzerland where they remained for the rest of their lives. Gertrude Jaspers described their life in Basel as 'life in asylum',³³ a phrase which, while probably recalling the terror of their existence under the Nazis, also expressed their growing distress at the political situation in Germany. In 1954, Jaspers voiced his unpopular opposition to German reunification and rearmament, which he saw as the product of a longing to return to the 'glory' of Bismarck's Prussia-dominated *Reich*. He held Bismarck responsible

for Germany's culture of obedience, which he contrasted with the culture of democratic participation prevailing in the otherwise similar countries of Switzerland and the Netherlands.³⁴ In 1966, Jaspers renounced his German citizenship and became a Swiss national in protest at the former Nazi Party member Kurt Kiesinger becoming German chancellor. In the same year, he published *Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?* (*Where [on earth] is the Federal Republic Going?*), translated into English as the rather anodyne *The Future of Germany*. In it, he denounced the planned emergency laws eventually introduced into the West German constitution in 1968—essentially a version of Article 48 in the Weimar constitution (GTC II 175–8)—and advocated resistance in the form of civil disobedience,³⁵ which, we shall see, he had earlier rejected. The work was influential within the student protests of 1968, protests which, in Germany, began as protests against the emergency laws. Although the protesters failed to get the emergency laws repealed, they helped move Germany towards a culture of participation rather than obedience. In 1969, the year of his death, the eighty-six-year-old Jaspers supported the decriminalisation of homosexuality by contributing to a volume entitled *Neither Sickness Nor Crime: Plea on Behalf of a Minority*.

The Question of German Guilt

The most widely discussed of Jaspers' postwar works is *The Question of German Guilt* (*Die Schuldfrage*), published in 1946. Beginning with 'Ladies and Gentlemen!', the work is a reasonably direct transcript of a series of lectures Jaspers delivered in 1945–46, immediately after the reopening of Heidelberg University in the American zone of occupied Germany. Apart from anything else, it is a valuable historical document, a record of the atmosphere of this extraordinary, shell-shocked moment in history. The audience for the lectures would have been very mixed. Some, as Jaspers notes, would have once seen the arrival of the Nazis as the beginning of a 'golden age', some would have hated the Nazis yet hoped for a German victory in the war, and some, like Jaspers himself, would have feared for their lives under the Nazis (QG 14–6). Given such different backgrounds, he says, it is difficult to find a common ground on which to base meaningful talk. Yet 'talking together (*Miteinanderreden*)' is essential, because hope for the future requires reckoning with the past. In particular, it requires facing up to the question of guilt.

This question, says Jaspers, was forced upon us in the summer of 1945 (Germany surrendered on May 7th) when, throughout the country, anonymous posters appeared with 'pictures and reports' from Belsen concentration camp accompanied by the caption 'You are guilty!' (QG 41). And it is being forced on us, too, he continues, by the Nuremberg trials (which ran from November 1945 to December 1946) (QG 47). But in what way are 'we' guilty? And does the 'we' include all surviving Germans or only some?

Jaspers' thesis is that there are four kinds of guilt: criminal or legal guilt, political guilt or 'liability (*Haftung*)', moral guilt, and 'metaphysical' guilt. His thesis is that while only those who performed the Nazi atrocities are legally guilty, all Germans are politically guilty, and that while only some are morally guilty, all are metaphysically guilty. I shall examine the four forms of guilt in the above order.

Legal guilt. This, says Jaspers, is the question being decided right now at the Nuremberg trials. It is not the German people who are on trial, for only individuals can be guilty of crimes. Though some may protest that the trials are the imposition of an arbitrary 'victor's morality', they are in fact grounded in the human rights guaranteed to everyone by the natural law tradition that is fundamental to the West (QG 49–50). The fact that the trials are occurring is a hopeful sign for the future: in recognising that there are 'crimes against peace'—wars of aggression—as well as 'crimes against humanity', the trials are realising the intention of the Kellogg-Briand Pact (of 1928) and are paving the way for a new world order that will eventually lead to 'world government' (QG 53). (As we shall see, Jaspers soon abandons the ideal of world government.)

Political Guilt. While there is no 'collective' guilt for the crimes of the Nazis, the Germans do bear collective political guilt: since they allowed the Nazis to come to power, they are politically 'implicated (*mitverantwortlich*)'. (Hitler, after all, came to power not via a putsch but by democratic means, and had massive majority support at least until the end of 1942.)

'Collective (*kollektiv*)' political guilt might be thought of as a guilt that attaches to the German people as a whole without necessarily attaching to every individual. But this is not Jaspers' meaning. He claims that 'every German (*jeder Deutsche*)' is politically implicated in the Nazi crimes because even those who refrained from voting facilitated the Nazi accession to power in so doing (QG 55–7). Rather oddly, Jaspers has nothing to say about the 13.2% of the voters who, in 1932, voted not for Hitler, but for the communist Ernst Thälmann. In 1958, however, in the *Future of Mankind*, he addresses the matter, claiming that those who voted for the communists were not only politically 'liable' but also 'morally guilty' (FM 310). (The thought, presumably, is that in failing to support the liberal-democratic Weimar government, the communists contributed to its weakening and hence to the rise of the Nazis, but this seems to confuse causal with normative responsibility: one surely cannot really be normatively responsible, blameworthy, for something one has, in some cases, given one's life to prevent.)

Moral Guilt. Since everyone has free will, everyone is morally responsible for their own actions. Jaspers holds that because only I can be the moral judge of my actions—presumably on the (doubtful) grounds that only I can know my true motives—he does not assert that every German is morally guilty for the Nazi crimes. But he does assert that every German has good reason to examine

their own motives in order to determine whether they might not have salved their conscience with some form of casuistry such as 'I was only obeying orders' or 'I thought I was living up to a glorious ideal' (QG 57–62). (One thinks of Heidegger's notorious claim that what he subscribed to was the 'inner truth and greatness of National Socialism' which was unfortunately betrayed by its reality [IM 199].)

Jaspers appears to think that over and above the question of individual moral guilt, there is a question of collective moral guilt: 'there is', he writes, 'a sort of collective moral guilt in a people's way of life which I share as an individual and from which grow political realities' (QG 70). What he has in mind is the Prussia-inspired 'sanctity' of 'this is an order', the cult of obedience (QG 60). This contradicts the claim that only individuals can judge their own moral status. And it also contradicts an earlier remark that

it is nonsensical ... to lay moral guilt to a people as a whole. There is no such thing as a national character extending to every single member of a nation.

(QG 34)

Given this confusion, I think it best to ignore the idea of 'collective moral guilt'.

Metaphysical Guilt. Explaining the concept of 'metaphysical guilt' Jaspers writes:

There is a solidarity between human beings as human beings that makes each co-responsible (*mitverantwortlich*) for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially for crimes that are performed in one's presence or with one's knowledge. If I do not risk my life to prevent the murder of another then I feel guilty in a way not adequately conceived either legally, politically or morally.

(QG 26)

It is on account of 'metaphysical guilt', says Jaspers, that 'no one is guiltless' (QG 16, 65).

There are two claims in the above passage, one about the alleged fact of guilt and one about its psychology. If I knew about the concentration camps, but did not risk my life opposing the Nazis on the grounds that such an act would have been entirely futile, I have an especially strong feeling of metaphysical guilt. Yet, since everyone is metaphysically guilty, even if I *did* risk my life but somehow survived, I am still guilty. The question, then, of whether or not one did everything in one's power to prevent the Holocaust is irrelevant to the fact of guilt.

Why should I feel 'responsible' for atrocities committed without my knowledge and even, perhaps, before my birth, and 'solidarity' with their perpetrators? 'If human beings were able to free themselves of metaphysical guilt', writes Jaspers, 'they would be angels and all the other three forms of guilt

would be immaterial' (QG 27). Like the existential guilt of the prewar works (pp. 38, 49–51 above), and like 'original sin', metaphysical guilt is inescapable: it comes with being human. It is difficult to make sense of this tortuous line of thought, but what he seems to be saying is that I feel (or should feel) responsible for the crimes of others because I recognise in myself the same human nature (Kant's 'crooked timber') that gives rise to them: 'we' humans committed those crimes, therefore I, as a representative of humanity, apologise to God, as it were, for what 'we' have done. (The fallacy in this line of thought seems to me to be a confusion between responsibility and shame: while feeling responsible, *blameworthy*, for the crimes of others makes no sense, feeling ashamed of the actions of one's fellow human beings does.)

Given there are four kinds of guilt there are, says Jaspers, four kinds of purification. Crimes must be punished, and reparations must be paid for political guilt. Insight into one's own moral guilt will take the form of a Scheler-like act of 'penance and renewal' (GTC II 151), an 'inner development then also taking effect in the world of reality'. Finally, awareness of one's metaphysical guilt must bring about 'a transformation of human self-consciousness before God' in which 'pride is broken'. With 'an indelible sense of guilt', we acquire a 'humility which grows modest before God' (QG 30). In a mood of Kierkegaardian 'despair', we realise that only in the posthuman world of the after-life can we be cleansed of metaphysical guilt.

Arendt and Blüchner's reactions to *The Question of German Guilt*

As Jaspers wrote to Arendt in July 1946, after the appearance of *The Question of German Guilt*, he was attacked from the right as a traitor to his country—presumably on account of the (confused) moral incrimination of the German 'way of life' (p. 61 above)—and also from the left.³⁶ Unbeknownst to him, one of his left-wing critics was beloved Hannah's communist-anarchist-philosopher husband, Heinrich Blüchner. Writing to his wife in July 1946, Blüchner claims that the actual function of Jaspers' 'Christian, fake-religious, sanctimonious drivel' about metaphysical guilt is not to encourage the Germans to accept responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis but to relieve them of it: as with 'original sin', metaphysical guilt shifts responsibility from them to God.³⁷ If we are all metaphysically guilty, if we are all created sinful, then *of course* we commit legal, political, and moral crimes. Metaphysical guilt absorbs the other forms of guilt and shifts the responsibility from humanity onto the God who created us. Many years later, Arendt makes a related point about universal guilt. Discussing racism in America in 1959, she writes that

[w]here all are guilty ... no one is; confessions of collective guilt are always the best possible safeguard against the discovery of actual culprits.³⁸

If the root source of evil is a universally shared human nature, then the victors are as guilty as the defeated, the victims as guilty as their executioners: to understand is to forgive everyone.

Arendt naturally kept Blüchner's hostile reaction to Jaspers' essay to herself. 'In all essentials', she tactfully wrote Jaspers in August 1946, 'monsieur' and I are in essential agreement. (She presumably calls Blüchner 'monsieur' because [through Walter Benjamin] they met and married in Paris.) Her own 'qualification' to his essay, however, concerns the idea of the Nazis as 'criminally guilty' and as meriting a specific punishment. The crimes of the Nazis, she writes, are so monstrous that they cannot be grasped in judicial terms. Goering of course needs to be hung, but the so-called 'punishment' is wholly inadequate to the crime.³⁹ Jaspers replies in October 1946 that it seems to him that 'satanic' and 'demonic' do not accord with his sense of the Nazis. Rather, he says, the crimes of the Nazis were 'thoroughly banal', performed out of a 'sober nihilism': 'bacteria can be diseases that threaten to destroy an entire people and yet remain mere bacteria'.⁴⁰ (According to Hitler's racial theory, Jews were a 'culture-destroying' race, a 'bacillus and fermenting agent of all social decomposition'.) The phrase 'banality of evil' is forever associated with Arendt's report on the 1963 trial in Jerusalem of Adolf Eichmann, the chief organiser of the logistics of the Holocaust. What is interesting about this correspondence is that the phrase was actually coined by Jaspers. Of further interest is the fact that, by 1963, Arendt had come round to Jaspers' view, at least with regard to Eichmann (GTC I 189).⁴¹ On the other hand, in 1958, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt still regards the Holocaust in general as the product of what she now calls 'radical' evil (a term that also comes from Jaspers [p. 64 below]), as incapable of a commensurate punishment (GTC I 229 n 24). Her eminently sensible final view seems to be that while some evil is 'banal', some is, in Jaspers' word, 'satanic'.

The atom bomb and the future of humanity

Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen (in the English translation, *The Future of Mankind*)⁴² appeared in 1958 in the midst of the Cold War. Although this was two years after a speech in which Khrushchev initiated the slow process of de-Stalinisation, a salient feature of the work, we shall see, is an anti-communism so implacable as to suggest that Jaspers had the American as well as German readership in mind.

The crisis

The atom bomb, writes Jaspers, confronts us with an existential crisis of global proportions. It has two sides. On the one hand, the invention of the bomb (and its acquisition by the Soviet Union in 1949) means that, for the first time in history, humanity has the capacity for total self-elimination. On the other hand, we confront the threat of totalitarianism, formerly in the form of fascism, now

in the form of a communist regime bent on world domination. Thus we find ourselves in a Hegelian situation. On the one hand, we are threatened with death, on the other, by a life of 'slavery' (FM 45), a life that is not worth living (FM 4).

Since there are two sides to the crisis, there are two sides to Jaspers' account of how we should respond to it. To deal with the threat of the nuclear holocaust, we must discover, he argues, a 'new way of thinking', a new 'moral-political' outlook (FM vii) so radical as to mark a 'transformation' of human nature, a 'turning point in history' (FM 4). To deal with the threat of totalitarian slavery, he argues, we need to rely on the solidarity of the Western alliance, on the threat, and in extremis use, of force.

Dealing with the bomb

Jaspers begins his account of how we should respond to the nuclear threat by identifying several false solutions to the problem. We may, for example, simply try to forget the 'nuclear menace' as a sick man tries to forget his cancer, but that, obviously, is an evasion rather than a solution (FM 6–7). Or we may claim that 'mutually assured destruction' renders global nuclear warfare unthinkable. This is a fatally flawed assumption because it does not take into account the actions of 'senseless men' in positions of power (FM 60)—the Dr Strangelove scenario.

Another flawed solution is pacifism (FM 36) in the form of unilateral disarmament coupled with the hope that an appeal to the 'conscience of the world' will force the antagonist to follow suit (FM 211). Jaspers likely has in mind here the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), founded in Britain in 1957 and with Bertrand Russell as a prominent spokesman. This, claims Jaspers, is the product of 'abstract' intellectualism (FM 211), a mode of thinking unacquainted with the 'blight' at the root of human nature, our capacity for 'radical evil' (FM 234). The tactics used by the CND movement were civil disobedience—Russell ended up in jail. And so Jaspers addresses the question of whether a movement of civil disobedience within all the nuclear nations might not produce global nuclear disarmament, given that these were the tactics successfully deployed by Gandhi to secure Indian independence from Britain. Gandhi, however, he argues, was a special case. He was successful only in the unusual circumstance of decent British liberalism which allowed him the freedom of speech to create his movement. The communists would have simply shot him (FM 37–40). (As noted earlier, [p. 59 above], Jaspers eventually modified his views on the effectiveness of civil disobedience.)

Pacifism is not, then, the solution to the problem of the bomb. This is because the way human beings are means that the use or threat of force cannot be eliminated from politics: 'in reality ... every human order is founded on

force' so that 'the essence of politics is association with force employed for self-preservation (FM 32, 35)—a conclusion continuous with Jaspers' prewar insistence on the inescapability of 'struggle' (pp. 38, 49s above). The problem with pacifism, however, concerns the means, not the end. The end, world peace and universal disarmament, is the only solution to the problem of the bomb (FM vii). What this requires is a supranational authority, but an authority with unprecedented powers and the military muscle to enforce it. The Westphalian settlement (GTC II 179–81) must be abandoned. While nationalism has a right to survive as a cultural phenomenon, it must be abandoned as a principle of power politics. Nations must surrender part of their sovereignty to the international body; the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a nation must give way to the right of the international body to defend human rights wherever they are abused (FM 90–1). This international body must not, however, be a world government (a revision of the view expressed in *The Question of German Guilt* [p. 60 above]). For while the common tradition of Christian culture could indeed make a European state viable, the multiplicity of different ways of life would inevitably make world government tyrannical towards some of them. Moreover, were all the military power concentrated in one body, there would be no checks on its use for totalitarian world control. What is needed therefore is a confederation of, in the first instance, the 'free' states of the West, a political-military body but with ultimate authority resting with its member states (FM 96–7).

Roughly, then, what is needed to avert the nuclear holocaust is a strengthened version of the 'liberal world order': a United Nations charged with defending human rights wherever they are under threat, and with the teeth to be effective in their defence. While all this is necessary to avert disaster, however, it is not sufficient. To be sufficient, it must be combined with a 'new way of thinking' and living.

The new way of thinking

The new way of thinking is in fact just the 'age-old' one of 'reason, i.e., philosophy' (FM 209). As intimated earlier, on the surface, this appeal to reason represents a sharp turning away from the irrationalism of the prewar works, their identification of authenticity with the reason-less 'leap' to existential decision. The question, though, is whether Jaspers' 'reason' has anything to do with 'reason' in any usual sense. The initial signs are not promising.

In saying that our 'salvation' depends on 'reason', Jaspers says he refers not to 'the mere intellect' but rather to 'grand reason' (FM vii). Whereas 'intellectual' thinking (at its best) is precise, confined to objects, and purposive (evidently instrumental rationality), 'rational' thinking transcends the intellect (FM 188). It transcends objects, expresses itself in images and metaphors, in a language that is 'indefinite', or rather polysemous, and is

contemplative rather than purposive. Reason 'goes beyond thinking to the source of thinking itself', to 'the encompassing, all-encompassing presence'. Reason is a 'basic mood', a loving attitude. It can only realise itself in 'loving communication'—one cannot be properly rational by oneself (FM 217–22).

Although 'reason' is in itself non-purposive, it is not without purposive implications. It is, in fact, the crucial 'suprapolitical' element that is needed to realise genuine liberal democracy. The possession of reason is what distinguished the 'statesman' from the mere 'politician': it gives him access to the 'all-encompassing', an access that unifies politics with 'ethos' and so inspires people's trust (FM 242–5). By 'ethos', Jaspers means the religious-ethical tradition of a community. He holds, as we have seen, that all religious-ethical traditions are 'cyphers' and 'symbols', 'images and metaphors', of the same 'all-encompassing' (pp. 50–1 above). Although they speak of the same thing, they do so in different 'languages', for which reason there is no 'universal' language of reason (FM 262–3).

So far, Jaspers' reason seems to have nothing at all to do with reason in any ordinary sense: in the sense, for instance, in which we think that things go better for us in life and politics if we proceed rationally rather than irrationally. What he seems to mean by 'reason' is the mythopoetic apprehension of the divine. As so far understood, in fact, 'reason' seems to be simply a rechristening of the Existenz of the prewar works, and as such, something like the opposite of reason in the familiar—Habermasian or Rawlsian—sense. Reason in that sense seems, in fact, to be what Jaspers dismisses as 'mere intellect'. But, in fact, Jaspers does not dismiss the intellect. While not identical with it, reason *includes* the intellect. Reason, as we have discussed it so far is, he says, the 'higher level' of reason as a totality, with intellect as its lower level (FM 188).

He discusses these two levels in relation to politics. The mere intellectual calculations of the politician—mere *Realpolitik*—by themselves, 'lead to nihilism and eventually total doom' (FM 188). They will do so because, presumably, the game-theoretic reliance on mutually assured destruction must eventually fail when the finger on the nuclear button belongs to a madman (p. 64 above) or to someone consumed by 'radical evil'. At the same time, however, 'higher' reason 'grows empty if it is not embodied in realism', and so it 'requires intellectual knowledge' (ibid.). Jaspers' conception of authentic politics, his conception of the statesman as opposed to the mere politician, is thus a version of Cromwell's instruction to his troops to 'put your faith in the Lord but keep your powder dry'. The statesman is also an effective politician because he is versed in the *Realpolitik* necessary to the realisation of his ethical vision.

Why are the intellectual calculations of political realism a necessary component of successful politics? Why, in particular, are they a necessary component of domestic politics? In a small, traditional society, says Jaspers, they are

probably not necessary. In such a society, a shared communal ethos obviates the need for discussion: 'love of home and country becomes one with democratic thinking' (FM 292). In a large, modern, multicultural society, however, there is no shared home or country: inevitably there are divergences of values and interests. Hence democracy—without which there is oppression and hence potential disorder—means an 'intellectual battle of opinions' in which people must 'reason together' to resolve them (FM 201–3). Note that since Jaspers thinks of the proper world order as analogous to the liberal-democratic state, he will similarly require that nations 'reason together' in the international arena.

Here, I think, we can see Jaspers working towards something like Habermas' 'communicative rationality', the search for a common good that is governed by the conditions of the 'ideal speech situation' in which all participants think for themselves, respect each other as equals, and refrain from non-rational modes of influence such as rhetoric or threats, so that in the end, 'consensus' is reached via, and only via, the 'force of the best argument' (see, further, p. 153 below). To Habermas' conception of 'reasoning together', Jaspers can perhaps be seen as adding that, ideally, in addition to Habermas' epistemic virtues, participants should also have a loving attitude (p. 66 above) and a non-dogmatic sense of the divine. A similar modification, we shall see, is implicit in Martin Buber's conception of dialogue.

Dealing with totalitarianism

Force, to repeat, is inseparable from politics (pp. 64–5 above), and force, if present, can only be resisted by force. The Soviet Union is, Jaspers believes, bent on the use of force to achieve world domination, a domination that, to repeat, will reduce us to totalitarian 'slavery'. Hence we must do nothing to disrupt the solidity of the Western alliance, and that means accepting the 'hegemonic position' of the United States. There must be no act of external politics without the prior approval of the Americans—the Anglo-French invasion of Suez was 'selfish and disloyal' (FM 101)—and in cases of disagreement 'America must prevail even when she is wrong' (FM 91–2).

'The idea that in the long run wars might be waged without the atom bomb', writes Jaspers, 'is an illusion' (FM 28): an illusion for the same reason that the idea of mutually assured destruction as a prophylactic against global nuclear war is an illusion—the madman's finger on the button, once again. But if we must be prepared to use force to resist communism, and if non-nuclear war between nuclear powers is impossible, does it not follow that avoiding totalitarian slavery and avoiding the nuclear holocaust are incompatible goals? Does it not follow, in fact, that we find ourselves confronted by a 'contradiction' which generates what, in his prewar writings, Jaspers calls a 'boundary situation'? Although he never explicitly resurrects the concept of the boundary situation,

Jaspers is aware of the 'contradiction'. And his resolution is the following: 'lest we lose human freedom', he writes,

we must not conceal the possibility that at some moment to come, a choice may have to be made between totalitarian rule and the atom bomb—between the destruction of a life worthy of man and the possible destruction of all men. A refusal to envision this possible alternative implies the loss of the courage of sacrifice. But sacrifice remains the foundation of true humanity.

(FM 66)

In other words, 'Better dead than red', as the slogan of the 1950s had it.

* * *

What, according to Jaspers, is wrong with totalitarianism? Why is Western democracy a better political system than Eastern communism? 'Being as such', we have already seen, is not a causal order. As Kant helps us see, being as such is the realm of 'existential freedom'. The will to political freedom is an act of our existential freedom. With the resources of modern technology at its disposal, however, communist totalitarianism threatens to extinguish our freedom. For the first time in history, the human 'essence' (FM 292) is threatened with extinction (FM 214–5).

Existential freedom, we know, is the power of self-creation. It follows that only the 'human rights' (FM 293) that are guaranteed by liberal democracy allow humanity to actualise its essence: 'The democratic idea rests on the human task of rational self-realisation, on the unique, irreplaceable character of every individual, on the dignity of man' (FM 299). It rests on the fact that 'no individual is replaceable', so that 'everyone, according to his lights, should be able to realise man's innate essence, his freedom' (FM 292). As men like de Tocqueville and Weber realised, there is nothing loveable about democracy for its own sake: in Churchill's famous mot, democracy is the very 'worst form of government except for all the others' (FM 292). Democracy is no more than a means: 'the goal is not democracy but freedom' (FM 308). Conversely, what is wrong with totalitarianism is that it denies us the ability to realise that essential quality that makes us human. Communism reduces humanity to subhuman 'slavery'.

Criticism

I shall make two criticisms of Jaspers' postwar work. They concern his anti-communism and his attempt to provide an existentialist foundation of liberal democracy.

As I mentioned, Jaspers revised some of the views expressed in the *Future of Mankind*—for instance, his views on the futility of civil disobedience. What he

never revised, however, was his implacable anti-communism and corresponding slavishness towards the United States. There are, I think, two deficiencies in the thought produced by Jaspers' almost hysterical anti-communism. The first is the absurdity of claiming that no life can be worth living under communist 'totalitarianism', that every individual is reduced to a condition of 'slavery'. Not only did many private Soviet lives escape the attention of a far-from-all-seeing state, even public figures, in spite of persecution, produced lives of great value: Prokofiev and Shostakovich, for instance. In spite of Stalin, the Soviet Union produced the two greatest composers of the twentieth century. Bertrand Russell was therefore certainly right to reverse the anti-communist slogan: if it comes to it, 'Better red than dead'.

The second deficiency caused by Jaspers' failure to answer to his own call for 'reason' in politics is his failure ever to engage seriously with the intellectual content of Marxism, dismissing it as no more than a religious 'creed' as intolerant as doctrinaire Catholicism (FM 263–4). That Marxism attracted philosophers of undoubted stature, figures such as Lukács, Bloch, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Sartre, is something he never wonders about, dismissing them as mere 'literary' figures (FM 94). It never crosses his mind, in particular, to wonder whether, whatever one might think of Marxist utopianism and historical determinism, there might be something important in the Marxist analysis of capitalism. And this lends a certain shallowness to his political thought. A resolution of the current crisis, he holds, requires a 'transformation' of human nature so radical as to mark the transition to a new historical epoch (p. 64 above). But what he misses is the Marxist insight that what counts as 'human nature' within an historical epoch is profoundly influenced by the economic system of that epoch. In the absence of insight into the, at least partial, truth of Marx's 'superstructure' thesis, his call for a new beginning—like Scheler's call for 'repentance'—threatens to be little more than a pious wish.

My second criticism concerns Jaspers' attempt to ground liberal democracy in existential freedom. His line of reasoning seems to be the following. (1) We are free, that is, self-creating beings: our fundamental values and goals, our fundamental identity, is the product of our own free (and ungrounded) choice. (2) Since we are all unique and irreplaceable (p. 68 above), the choices we wish to make are radically divergent. (3) Only liberal democracy allows us to 'realise', to live out, our choices. (4) Only if we are able to realise our free (and ungrounded) choices can we live worthwhile, happy lives. Therefore (5), only in liberal democracy can we live worthwhile and happy lives.

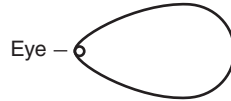
What should give initial pause about this argument is the fact that liberal democracy is a modern invention, scarcely a century old. It seems, however, absurd to suggest that prior to the past 100 years, no human being was capable of happiness. (Bertrand Russell was of the view that only those born *before* the First World War were capable of happiness.) All of the steps in this argument are problematic. Most problematic of all, however, seems to me to be premiss

(4). It is certainly true that modern liberal-democratic societies allow—and in fact demand—that we choose our identities. What used to count as incapable ‘facticity’, sex, sexuality, the difference between beauty and ugliness, right and wrong, is now something we are compelled to choose. As earlier intimated, however (p. 43 above), when fundamental values are perforce grounded in nothing but choice, attachment to them cannot be ‘wholehearted’. What is lacking in an age of *radical* choice, an age in which there is no value tradition that we are ‘already in’, is meaning. In the end, one is struck by the emptiness of the ideal of existential freedom, by the fact that, in the end, it reduces to nihilism.

Notes

- 1 Kirkbright (2004) 218.
- 2 Though Heidegger is notoriously sparing with his approval of contemporary figures, *Being and Time* makes three favourable references to Jaspers’ book: to Jaspers’ discussion of death (BT 249), to his work as an ‘existential anthropologist’ who discusses ‘what man is’ and what his essential possibilities are (BT 301), and to the ‘moment of vision’ (BT 338).
- 3 Heidegger (1998) 1–38.
- 4 Together with a friend, Sartre translated Jaspers’ *General Psychology* into French. His short stories ‘The Wall’ and ‘The Room’ reveal his fascination with the ‘limit situations’. As we shall see, the slogan in terms of which Sartre defines existentialism—‘existence before essence’—is essentially the position enunciated much earlier by Jaspers. Camus’ access to Jaspers came second-hand via Jeanne Hersch’s *L’illusion philosophique* (Hersch [1936]).
- 5 Heidegger (1998) 4.
- 6 Quoted in Heidegger (1998) 379.
- 7 For discussion of the inseparability of ontology and, specifically, ethical values see Young (2001) 25–9.
- 8 This dubious projection of logical consistency—and a particular kind of logical consistency—onto our mental lives carries over to Sartre, who assumes that everyone has a ‘fundamental project’ to which all of their lesser projects contribute (p. 21).
- 9 Weber’s description of the modern industrial-bureaucratic workplace as a *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, which should strictly be translated as ‘steel casing’, is commonly translated as ‘iron cage’ (GTC I 10). At one point Jaspers actually offers ‘cage (*Käfig*)’ as a synonym for *Gehäuse* in its negative meaning (PW 293).
- 10 The most natural translation of *echt* is ‘authentic’. My use of this translation should not, however, obscure the difference between Jaspers’ notion of authenticity and the ‘authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*)’ of *Being and Time*. Heidegger himself makes the distinction, represented by his English translators as a distinction between the ‘authentic’ and the ‘genuine’. An ‘*uneigentlich* (inauthentic)’ stance to the world can, says Heidegger, be nonetheless ‘*echt* (genuine)’ (BT 148). I may be slavishly loyal to ‘the They’, and hence *uneigentlich*, yet such slavishness might just be the real (*echtes*), timidly conventional, me. The *echt*, says Heidegger, is that which is ‘drawn directly’ from the phenomena (BT 32) and is as such the opposite of superficial, ‘idle’, talk. ‘Communism is evil’ said by someone who has never left Kentucky is almost certainly ‘idle talk’, but said by someone who grew up in East Germany is likely to be *echt*. This corresponds to what Jaspers says about *Echtheit*. An image of the self and the world is *Unecht* when it stands in a ‘superficial’ rather than ‘deep’, ‘dishonest’ rather than ‘honest’, relation to one’s facticity, one’s actual needs and desires (PW 84).
- 11 Young (2014) 164–5.
- 12 Jaspers discusses the *Grenzsituation* at length in both *Psychology of Worldviews* and in *Philosophy*. For reasons I shall come to (pp. 48), while ‘limit situation’ is the best translation of *Grenzsituation* as it occurs in the former discussion, ‘boundary situation’ is preferable with respect to the latter.

- 13 Young (2014) 192.
- 14 Young (2014) 155–7.
- 15 Camus (2000) 36.
- 16 Young (2014) 162–4.
- 17 Young (2014) 32–3.
- 18 The word ‘Existenz’ (*Eksistens* in Danish) Jaspers takes over from Kierkegaard (P I 56n). He uses it frequently in *Psychology of Worldviews* but entirely without *Philosophy’s* contrast between it and ‘existence’ (*Dasein*). There, it merely means something like ‘the flow of life beneath the level of rational thought’.
- 19 Wittgenstein expresses Jaspers’ thought by means of an elegant analogy. ‘The form of the visual field’, he writes in proposition 5.634 of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, ‘is surely not like this’:



- 20 Or at least, apparent death. If one takes Kant’s idealism seriously, if nature is mere appearance, then the death of the embodied self is mere appearance as well. That he treats death as a fully real event shows that Jaspers does not take Kant seriously. All he really takes from him is the idea of two worlds. Implicitly, both are treated as fully real. As we are about to see, Jaspers’ account of freedom is another respect in which he departs from Kant.
- 21 This idea of an unconditioned human action plays an important role in the philosophy of Jaspers’ student Hannah Arendt, who uses ‘action’ in a technical sense to mean ‘new beginning’ or ‘first cause’ (GTC I 200–1).
- 22 This ‘must’—a psychological claim—reveals another affinity with Schopenhauer, who claims that
 Just as the chord of the seventh demands the fundamental chord; just as a red colour demands green, and even produces it in the eye; so every tragedy demands an existence of an entirely different kind, a different world

(Schopenhauer [1969] II 433)

That Jaspers frequently talks about the ‘riddle’ of life, Schopenhauer’s signature expression, makes it clear that he did indeed read the great pessimist.

- 23 Jaspers claims that, as with every boundary situation, one can evade the boundary situation of historicity only by ‘closing [one’s] eyes’ (P II 179), but it is unclear to me why everyone should experience their historical facticity as a boundary situation. One might, to be sure, experience, say, one’s sex as a ‘confinement’, but this is hardly a universal predicament. One might wish to be stronger or cleverer than one is, but this hardly renders existence as such ‘questionable’. Mortality, of course, is a challenging feature of our facticity, but that is a ‘specific’ boundary situation rather than the boundary situation of facticity as such.
- 24 Note that the life-as-a-sequence-of-life-segments view of *Psychology of Worldviews* (p. 42) invites one to view death as the exclusive concern of a future self and hence of no concern to my present self. It invites one to ignore one’s fragility, the fact that death *can happen now*. In *Heidegger’s* sense of authenticity, precisely this constitutes *inauthentic* being-towards-death (GTC I 143–4).
- 25 Camus (2000) 36–41.
- 26 Heidegger (1998) 311. See GTC I 252, n.16.
- 27 Heidegger (1989) 213. At PLT 58 Heidegger speaks of the source of all ‘truth’ as a *Herkunftsbereich*, ‘originating region’ (mistranslated by Hofstadter as ‘reservoir’). At PLT 103, he speaks of Being as the ‘unheard-of-centre’ of all things.
- 28 Young (2002) 18–21.
- 29 Young (2002) 58.
- 30 Heidegger’s statement that ‘insofar as we think in the most serious way, we give thanks’ for ‘the wonder that a world worlds’ matches, almost exactly, the words of the Catholic author G. K. Chesterton, who writes, ‘I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder’.

- 31 Lukács (1980) 521.
- 32 *Praeceptor Germaniae* is the phrase Wallace uses (Wallace [2017] 44) in his excellent but unfortunately unpublished PhD thesis.
- 33 Kirkbright (2004) 208.
- 34 Jaspers (1954) 605–7.
- 35 Jaspers (1967) 87–9.
- 36 Arendt (2001) 95.
- 37 Arendt (1996) 146.
- 38 Arendt (1969).
- 39 Arendt (2001) 90.
- 40 Arendt (2001) 99.
- 41 Although considering him banal, Arendt still supported Eichmann's execution—unlike Martin Buber who, in line with the ideals of his Ihud Party (p. 158), along with Gershom Scholem and others, wrote to the Israeli President pleading for clemency (Jeremy Adler, *Times Literary Supplement* 6173 July 23, 2021).
- 42 Jaspers (1961).

3 Edith Stein

Empathy, community, and Catholicism

Edith Stein was born in 1891 into a middle-class Jewish family in Breslau in Silesia (now Wroclaw in Poland) a province in the eastern part of Prussia. Her family were observant Jews, but, originally devout, she turned to atheism in her teenage years. As a university student in Breslau, she discovered Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (GTC I chap. 5) and, in 1913, transferred to Göttingen where he was a professor. She developed close relations with some of his leading students, Adolf Reinach, Roman Ingarden, and Hedwig Conrad-Martius in particular, and had friendly relations with Heidegger. At Göttingen, she was impressed by the lectures of the Catholic philosopher Max Scheler (GTC II chap. 5), who is actually a stronger influence on her work than Husserl. In spite of Husserl's lack of support—he suggested she was more suited to high school than university teaching—she completed a PhD thesis in 1916, which was published as *On the Problem of Empathy* (section I below). Meanwhile, determined to contribute to the German war effort, she had trained as a Red Cross nurse, and in 1915, worked in a field hospital for wounded soldiers. From 1916 to 1918, she worked as Husserl's paid assistant but eventually resigned—with notable grace and lack of bitterness—because he treated her as a secretary rather than collaborator. Campaigning to be allowed to write a Habilitation (the second book-length thesis required for a German academic career), something hitherto denied to women, she received only lukewarm support from Husserl, who saw no need to reverse the current exclusion of women from the professorate. Unable to find accreditation as a Habilitation student, she completed the thesis anyway and published it as *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (section II below).

In 1921, Stein experienced the great epiphany of her life. At the home of her friend the Christian phenomenologist Hedwig Conrad-Martius, she discovered the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila, read it overnight, and announced, 'this is truth'. The following year, to her mother's great distress, she was baptised into the Catholic Church and took her first communion. From her new perspective, she began an intense study of Aquinas and completed two works that attempted to combine Husserl and Aquinas, phenomenology and Thomism: *Potency and Act* of 1931 and *Finite and Eternal Being* of 1935–37 (section V below). During this period, she also wrote a number of essays expressing her

thoughts on the feminist movement as it then was (section VI below). *Potency and Act* had been intended as yet another Habilitation thesis, but once again, her ongoing attempt to gain a university position was blocked by gender discrimination. From 1923 to 1931, she taught at a girls high school and then at two different teacher training colleges.

The Nazi accession to power in 1933 put a final end to any hope of an academic post. In the same year, she became a Carmelite nun and entered the convent in Cologne. Since it was a contemplative order, Stein—now Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross—was encouraged to continue writing. (The order has its own publishing house and has generously made Stein's collected works in both German and English translation freely available on the Internet.) After the *Kristallnacht* of 1938, Stein was transported under cover of darkness to the Carmelite convent in Echt, just over the border in the Netherlands. It was here she turned away from philosophy and began to write works of Christian mysticism, most notably *The Science of the Cross*. In 1942, she was arrested by the Gestapo and, together with her sister Rosa, transferred to Auschwitz where they were both gassed. Survivors of the camp spoke of the compassion with which she ministered to her fellow sufferers. In 1998, she was canonised by her fellow Christian phenomenologist Pope John Paul II (GTC II 3, 143, 147, 153). (There were some complaints, on the grounds that she was not martyred as a Catholic but murdered as a Jew.) The following year John Paul made her one of the three Patron Saints of Europe as a whole.

Section I: The problem of empathy

Stein's doctoral thesis *On the Problem of Empathy* (*Zum Problem der Einfühlung*) (PE)¹ was the result of Husserl more or less contracting out the topic of empathy to his brilliant student. It is the work for which she was best known by her contemporaries: Max Scheler refers to it respectfully, as does Husserl's student Gerda Walther. As in nearly all her works, there is no continuous argument towards a single conclusion. What she offers, rather, are interesting answers to a number of questions more or less closely related to the topic of empathy. Stein's principal questions seem to me to be the following:

- (1) What is empathy?
- (2) What role does empathic knowledge of other minds play in my knowledge of my own mind?
- (3) What is a person?
- (4) Is disembodied personal existence possible?

What is empathy?

Contemporary discussions of empathy, says Stein, take it for granted that there are other consciousnesses and that we do have knowledge of them. The project

is not to defeat Cartesian scepticism about 'other minds' but rather to identify the ways in which we acquire the knowledge we have of them (PE 3). To borrow a phrase from Gadamer, her project is to describe 'what happens' (GTC I 156) when we know about the psychic lives of others.

Empathy, says Stein, is 'the experience in general of foreign consciousness' (PE 11). While this might make it look as though 'empathy' is used to cover all of our ways of knowing about other minds, this cannot quite be her intention, given that she distinguishes between empathetic and 'mere' knowledge of other psyches. In empathetic apprehension, she says, I 'have' an affective or cognitive state of the other, whereas mere knowledge of that state is 'blind' and 'empty' (PE 19). I think the intended distinction is between theoretical and experiential knowledge. Economic or psychological theory may provide us with reasonable beliefs about a subject's desires and intentions but not by providing us with the experience of those desires and intentions, not by bringing them to 'givenness'. Empathy, on the other hand, does bring the 'foreign' state to experiential givenness. 'Empathy' then, seems to cover all the ways in which we know about other minds that are based on experience of those minds: empathy, she says, is 'a kind of perceiving act (*Art erfahrender Akte*)' (PE 11). As I understand her, there are two basic kinds of empathetic acts, which I shall call 'perceptual empathy' and 'empathy as empathising'. Before we can discuss these two modes, however, an important technical distinction needs to be introduced.

Primordial versus non-primordial experience

Stein's technical distinction is between 'primordial' or 'originary' experience and non-primordial experience, between, that is, immediate experience and experience that is mediated by immediate experience. So, for example, in memory—which Stein regards as bearing important similarities to empathy—the memory of one's own past joy is a primordial experience, but the past joy, which was once a primordial experience is now non-primordial since it is known about only through the act of remembering. The same distinction applies to fantasy, another analogue of empathy: my fantasising myself being proudly knighted by the Queen is a primordial experience; the fantasised pride is non-primordial.

Empathy in general, says Stein, is a primordial act whose content or intentional object is 'a non-primordial experience which announces a primordial one' (PE 14). In seeing the joy in the face of the other, what is, for the other, a primordial experience is apprehended in a non-primordial way by me. This distinction enables Stein to distinguish empathy from similar phenomena that could be, and by other theorists have been, confused with empathy. So, for example, Theodor Lipps' account of empathy as a 'feeling of oneness', a merging of two 'I's in which the empathiser shares in the primordial experience of the 'foreign' consciousness, is mistaken. Lipps' paradigm of empathy concerns the way in which, in watching a football match (his actual example concerns an

acrobat), one tends to make at least the beginnings of the bodily movement one sees that the player needs to make. This, he thinks, shows that I am fully 'in' the consciousness of the other. Stein claims that, actually, the experience of the bodily movements assigned to the other is different from the primordial experience of one's own movements. The latter contain an 'I move' ingredient. The former, by contrast, are ones I am *led* into making (PE 16–17). This subtle critique of Lipps is quite hard to grasp. But Stein's general point that 'feeling of oneness' will not do as a general paradigm of empathy is clearly correct: although I empathise with Desdemona in her final moments, I do not take my own life to be in danger.

Stein does not deny that the 'feeling of oneness' in which the other's primordial experience becomes one's own sometimes occurs. Her point, rather, is that this is a case of *Mitfühlen*, 'fellow feeling' or 'sympathy', rather than *Einfühlen*, 'empathy' (PE 14). This linguistic distinction sounds odd to Anglophone ears, accustomed, as we are, to regard empathy as a more intimate relation than sympathy, but it makes sense in German given the difference between the prefixes *mit* (with) and *ein* (into). In sympathy, Stein wants to say, we experience *with* the other, in empathy we gain access *into* the other's primordial state without actually sharing in it.

Another experience that needs to be carefully distinguished from empathy is the 'we' experience. We (on the home front during the First World War) all hear the news that the enemy fortress has fallen and are simultaneously filled with joy. Although the perception of the other people's joy intensifies my own, it is still my own primordial joy I experience and no one else's, Stein wishes to say (PE 17). I shall have more to say about 'we' experiences in connection with Stein's social philosophy (section III below).

Perceptual empathy

The first of Stein's two kinds of empathy is a matter of direct perception. In the blush, she says, I *see* the other's shame (PE 14); in the furrowed brow, the other's pain (PE 51). Stein does not deny that shame and pain are also inner experiences—she is not a behaviourist. Her point, rather, is epistemological. In, as Husserl calls it, the 'natural attitude', affective states are frequently 'given in' the face of the other in somewhat the same way as, in ordinary perception of, say, a house: the back of the house is 'given in' my perception of the front. In normal perception, the content of the perceptual act is 'a house', not 'a house façade' (GTC I 97–100). What Stein is concerned to reject is the idea—she attributes it to J. S. Mill (PE 26), but it is more familiarly associated with Descartes—that we *infer* from bodily phenomena to the mental states of others: 'I grimace when in pain, she is grimacing, so probably she is in pain'. Although inference may occur in exceptional circumstances, as an account of the way in which we normally know about the affective states of others, it is based on poor phenomenology. For it supposes that what we see are simply *bodies*, some of

which are human and some not. But this is mistaken: in perceptual encounters with our fellow human beings, we encounter not bodies, but rather 'living bodies'. So, for example, in seeing someone about to rise from a chair, I see a hand not *lying*, but rather *pressing* on the table (PE 58). The movements of others are given, not as 'mechanical' motions, but rather as movements that 'express' (PE 5 et passim) psychic life. Stein's point, I think, is contained in the phrase 'body language'. The relation of expression between affective states and bodily gestures is similar to the relation between a set of linguistic marks or sounds and the meaning that they convey: one does not infer from sounds to meaning, one simply hears, for example, *a warning*. This, then, is the first kind of empathy: in seeing the living bodies of other human beings, we see their feelings. Typically, as the saying has it, we 'wear our feelings on our sleeves'.

Empathy as empathising

To our ears, it sounds odd to refer to the above way of knowing about others as 'empathy'. Empathy, we think, requires a positive (and commendable) act of 'empathising with', the imaginative act of 'putting oneself in the shoes' of the other. But if the inner is simply visible on the outer, there seems no need for such an act. Stein does not ignore empathy in this more familiar sense: her second kind of empathy is this act of imaginative projection into the inner life of the other.

Understanding the hand as pressing rather than lying on the table is an example of a mode of perceptual empathy Stein calls 'sensual empathy'. But sensual empathy is not merely sensual: 'thanks to the fact that sensation essentially belongs to an "I", there is already a foreign "I" given', together with the 'constitution' of that foreign self (PE 60), a constitution that includes 'the spiritual (*geistig*)'. What this givenness of the 'spiritual' embraces, crucially, is the understanding of the other as a 'zero point of orientation' (PE 61): as possessing, that is, a 'world image (*Weltbild*)', a perspective on the perceptual world with the other's embodied self as its spatio-temporal centre. Through the imaginative act of 'empathetic projection' (PE 25), I can normally understand how the world looks from the other's point of view, although, adds Stein, I probably cannot empathise with the world image of a blind person (PE 62).

In apprehending the foreign 'I' in its spiritual aspect, I grasp not merely the alien world image but also the 'worldview (*Weltanschauung*)' distinctive of that alien self, a worldview that may be markedly different from my own (PE 96).² To account for how we empathise with worldviews radically different from our own, Stein effectively endorses Dilthey's account of the methodology of the human sciences, and in particular, his view of the role of empathy in historical interpretation.³

A difficulty with historical interpretation lies in the fact that the historian always belongs to a particular personality type. This creates the temptation to project one's own personality onto the historical actor, a projection liable to falsify

the past since the historical actor likely belongs to a different personality type. This is why the great historian Leopold von Ranke ‘would have liked to “erase” himself in order to see things “as they were”’ (PE 116, GTC I 168–9). Although this is, of course, impossible, it remains a fact that we can (correctly) understand people whose personality type is different from our own. Though a ‘sceptic’ myself, says Stein, I can understand *homo religiosus* (this repeats Dilthey’s account of his own relation to Luther [p. 25 above]), and though I consider material wealth unimportant, I can understand someone for whom it is the highest goal. In understanding how this is possible, says Stein, we see the importance of Dilthey’s insistence that ‘the interpretative faculty operating in the human sciences is the whole person’. For, she adds, ‘only he who experiences himself as a person, as a meaningful whole, can understand other persons’ (PE 114–60). This is a reference to Dilthey’s view that human beings differ not ‘qualitatively’ but only ‘quantitatively’ (pp. 26 above), that even the atheist has a tiny amount of religious feeling, even the ascetic priest has a fraction of desire for material (and, as we know, sexual) pleasure. And so what one does when one puts oneself in the ‘shoes’ of the radically other is to accentuate, temporarily inhabit, desires that, while recessive in oneself are dominant in the other, and de-emphasise desires dominant in oneself but recessive in the other. As we shall see (pp. 81–2 below), Stein identifies personality types with value hierarchies, and so this process of emphasis and concealment amounts to temporarily reordering one’s value hierarchy so that it matches the hierarchy of the foreign ‘I’. Notice that—this, I think, is Stein’s original contribution to Dilthey’s account—one must have a high degree of self-knowledge to be aware of the recessive parts of one’s own psychology. As we are about to see, Stein argues that self-knowledge presupposes knowledge of others. But she also holds that knowledge of others presupposes knowledge of oneself. As Heidegger would put the point, the two modes of knowledge are ‘equiprimordial’.

Empathy as a condition of self-knowledge

It is not until the fourth of Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* that he convinces himself that he is not alone, that there are indeed other conscious beings. That knowledge comes only subsequently to his knowledge of his own thoughts and feelings and his knowledge that he is an embodied being in a world of bodies. Stein rightly rejects this as a possible epistemic order. I know in primordial experience that I have thoughts and feelings. But my knowledge that I also have a body—that I am a ‘psycho-physical’ being—is possible only through empathy with other conscious beings. A physical body, that is, is something that appears in different but systematically related ways when viewed from different perspectives. And so I only grasp my own embodiment by grasping that there are other ‘zero points of orientation’ with their own perspectives on my body: only by empathising with someone else’s experience of my living body do I properly grasp my own embodiment (PE 63–4).⁴ To make this point

in another way, it is only through empathy that I grasp the distinction between appearance and reality. Only by grasping that there are other 'zero points' each with their own apparent worlds do I grasp that there is a world existing independently of my perception.

Empathetic knowledge of the existence and nature of other consciousnesses is essential to knowledge not merely of my embodied nature, but also of my spiritual nature. To fully understand my own inner nature, I must engage in 'reiterated empathy' with others. I must, that is, empathise with someone else's empathetic understanding of me: 'to consider the psychic "I" and its attributes means to see ourselves as we see another and he sees us'. To engage in reiterated empathy is, from the standpoint of the other, to 'look through my bodily expression at [my] "higher psychic life"' (my character, in other words) and thereby comprehend 'the "image" the other has of me'. This looks to be a version of the Hegelian–Sartrean view that 'the other holds the secret of my being', which we shall see Honneth adopting (p. 231 below), but Stein resists this elevation of the second-person perspective over the first. It may well be, she says, that my own 'primordial inner experience' of myself exposes the other's interpretation of my character as a 'deception'. This means that (contra Hegel and Honneth) the other's image of me does not 'constitute' my character but only provides an aid to self-knowledge. On the other hand, self-deception is also a possibility, which makes it 'possible for another to "judge me more accurately" than I judge myself'. (As both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche quote La Rochefoucauld, 'self-esteem is cleverer than the cleverest man in the world'.) True self-knowledge is thus the result of a synthesis between my perception of myself and the other's perception of me (PE 88–90).

The constitution of a person

What is it to be a person? With respect to humans, at least, a person is a 'psycho-physical unity' (PE 39 et passim), an embodied mind or 'psyche' with two-way causal interaction between its constituent elements, something Stein will explore more thoroughly in her next work, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*. Within the psyche, however, there is a further distinction between 'soul (*Seele*)' and 'spirit (*Geist*)'. A person, as she later puts it, is a 'composite of body, soul, and spirit' (FEB 363).

What makes the distinction between soul and spirit initially puzzling is that Stein reverses the meanings that are more familiar to us. Whereas we think of 'soul' as an essentially religious concept and 'spirit' (*Geist* can also be translated as 'mind') as the more secular of the two, for Stein, if either of them is of interest to religion, it is spirit rather than soul. Though she does not explicitly mention him until her post-conversion works (pp. 113 below), in using 'soul' in an entirely secular sense, Stein is following Aristotle, who takes soul to be the 'form' of the living body, the 'entelechy' in an organism that accounts for its developing into the organism it is.

The soul, says Stein cannot be separated from the body: it is 'always necessarily a soul in a body' (PE 40), a part of nature (PE 56). Animals have souls (as Aristotle says) (PE 3). Transitory states of consciousness caused by changes in the body, the lethargy I feel when exhausted, are states of the soul (PE 39; see further, pp. 84–5 below). The core of the soul, however, is a number of 'persisting attributes' (PE 109): one's 'temperament', whether one is basically cheerful or melancholy, is a 'natural basic disposition of the soul' (EW 43), as is one's capacity to enjoy sensory beauty (PE 110). While certain of these enduring attributes are attributes of both the soul and the person whose soul it is (PE 109), the soul is not the same as the person but rather its 'bearer' (PE 39).

The essential point about the soul as presented in the empathy book (its nature will change in the post-conversion works) is that there is nothing more to it than biology. Its permanent attributes constitute one's 'nature'—one's genetic inheritance, Stein might now say—a nature that is the 'bearer' of one's life although not its determinant. (Stein's account of 'free will' will be a central topic in section II.) In this conception, the soul seems to resemble Kant's conception of 'inclination': it is something we have to take account of, and sometimes battle against, in order to be good people.

* * *

Spirit, the 'spiritual subject', is that which is studied by the human sciences. All cultural entities are the product of spirit. Spirit is subject to the laws of reason and is responsible for all theoretical acts (PE 91–6). Unlike the soul, however, it is not a natural entity: the line between nature and culture runs through the division between soul and spirit.

Consciousness of states of the soul, says Stein, is a 'causally conditioned occurrence'. But consciousness is also 'object constituting'. Here, the conscious subject has

stepped out of nature and faces it. Consciousness as a correlate of the object world is not nature but spirit.

(PE 91)

This fallacious inference is inherited from Scheler who attributes to Kant the discovery of the distinction between 'psyche' and 'spirit'. Since, like the eye, the 'I' does not perceive itself—no content of consciousness reveals itself as the subject of consciousness—there must, Stein reasons, be two 'I's, the embodied empirical self and the 'transcendent' (PPH 23) self that is conscious of spatio-temporal entities, among them the empirical self. This is a tiresome misreading of Kant: as Kant emphasises, the transcendental 'I', the 'transcendental unity of apperception', is a mere form of consciousness—to be mine, all my conscious states must be attributed to the same subject. But that consciousness has

this form tells us nothing at all about the bearer of the formal 'I'. The bearer could indeed be a non-natural, disembodied spirit but so too could it be a brain or even a team of brains. There is, in short, no valid inference from the necessity of a transcendental 'I' to a transcendent 'I'. (I have cut a long story short: for a fuller discussion, see GTC II 158–60.)

Spirit, to repeat, is the subject of all theoretical activity. It is possible to conceive a purely 'theoretical' spirit, a pure knower. But that would not be a person because, according to a tradition Stein endorses, 'the "I" is constituted in emotions'. As soon as emotions come into focus, we discover the 'depth' that constitutes a person as a person (PE 98).

Emotions, rising from the 'depth of the "I"', announce one's 'personal' (ethical) attributes. They do this because they reveal one's values: emotion and value are inseparable because to have an emotional attitude to something is to value it, either negatively or positively. Crucially, it is emotions (or 'feelings') that reveal one's hierarchy of values: the intense pain on the loss of a loved one reveals just how high they stood on one's personal scale of value, the devastation someone feels on account of sudden loss of wealth reveals just how high material wealth stands in their hierarchy of values (PE 99–101).

Stein says that someone who is overcome by loss of wealth rather than being 'indifferent' to it is 'irrational' (PE 101). Alasdair MacIntyre complains that she does not identify the standard of rationality that underlies this startling remark.⁵ In fact, however, indirectly, she does: the wealth-obsessed individual is irrational because 'he inverts the value hierarchy or loses sensitive insight into higher values altogether, causing him to lack the correlative personal levels' (ibid.). In the context in which she was writing, there is only one possible referent for '*the* value hierarchy', namely, Max Scheler's celebrated 'objective hierarchy of values'. Stein does not make this explicit almost certainly because she could assume that her examiners were familiar with Scheler's work and his importance to her. Roughly speaking, in Scheler's (very Platonic) hierarchy, bodily values, varieties of sensual pleasure, lie at the bottom of the hierarchy, which then ascends to the 'life'-enhancing values such as health, thence to 'spiritual' values, and finally, at the top, to the value of holiness (see GTC II 140–42 for a fuller account). In a later work, she makes it explicit that this is the hierarchy to which she is committed: women, she writes, need to be educated into 'an objective hierarchy of values' that 'places supernatural values above all earthly ones' (EW 105). For both Scheler and Stein, the hierarchy of values represents a realm of moral fact, of objective truth that is accessible to anyone. It follows that someone who thinks that money trumps love is irrational in the way that someone who thinks that two is a higher number than four is.

The 'core' of a person is, says Stein, their 'personal structure', their value hierarchy. Expressed otherwise, it is their moral character. It is, she says, 'impossible to formulate a doctrine of the person ... without a value doctrine': from such a doctrine 'the person can be obtained' (PE 108). This is why we

can imagine Caesar as a humble villager or even as living in the twentieth century (PE 110). (Schopenhauer, for whom ‘intelligible character’ corresponds to Stein’s personal ‘core’, makes the same point: it is the same human type that is on display ‘whether ministers dispute about countries and nations over a map, or peasants in a beer-house choose to wrangle over cards and dice’.)⁶ The value ‘structure’ of the ideal person (as Scheler says) corresponds exactly to the objective hierarchy; various other personality types represent its various possible distortions, the ways in which, and degrees to which, one can fall short of the ideal. Since there is a finite number of values and so a finite number of value configurations, it is in principle possible to enumerate all human personality types. Actual ‘empirical persons’ are ‘realisations’ of these types, although usually imperfectly so. Social circumstances may block the ‘unfolding’ of a high value or encourage one to develop habits at odds with one’s true ‘core’ (PE 108–15).

Disembodied existence

The final question Stein confronts in *On the Problem of Empathy* is the question of the possibility of disembodied existence. While a human body without an ‘I’ would be a corpse, an ‘I’ without a material body, a purely spiritual ‘I’ is, as we have seen Stein claiming, conceivable. The very term *Geist* (which can mean ‘ghost’ as well as ‘spirit’) tells us this (PE 49). It would, however, be a strange kind of being, devoid of the psycho-physical correlates of emotions: with us, our pulse races with alarm, our breathing quickens with joy. But a pure spirit (Dr Spock, for instance) would experience none of these sensations. Such somatic sensations, however, are merely accidental correlates of the corresponding emotions: God (if he exists) can rejoice over the repentance of a sinner without his heart pounding or experiencing any other somatic sensations (PE 50).

But while possible, is disembodied, purely spiritual existence actual? Some report feeling the effects of God’s grace and others report the guidance of a protective spirit. But whether these are veridical experiences is uncertain. Further investigation in the form of a study of religious consciousness may be the way to answer the question, Stein concludes. While she is clearly open to the claims of religion, the answer to the question is for her, at this stage, ‘*non liquet*, not yet clear’ (PE 117–18).

Section II: Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities

Stein’s *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (which I shall call ‘the *Beiträge*’) is translated as *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*.⁷ It was completed in 1920 and is dedicated to Husserl whose assistant she still was during the time of its writing. As earlier

mentioned, it was intended as her Habilitation thesis at Göttingen. Like Husserl's own writing, it is dense, technical, and engaged in the microscopic examination of 'the phenomena'. It is composed of two relatively independent parts: Part I is concerned with 'Psychic Causality' and Part II with 'Individual and Community'. I begin with Part I.

The issue

The issue confronted in Part I, a staple in every introductory philosophy course, is that of free will versus determinism: the question, as Stein puts it, of whether we belong to the 'great causal network of nature' either entirely or only in part (PPH 2). In a letter of September 1919, Stein summarises what she takes to be the *Beiträge's* modest achievement, as well as the significance of that achievement:

I do not believe I have cut the knot concerning the problem of the free will. I have only emphasized the negative—at least, what seems to me to be certain—that the spontaneity of the will cannot be deduced from the individual strengths and natural tendencies. Then, I have opened the door to the philosophy of religion in whose domain further investigations must take place.

(SP 29)

However much we know about the nature and circumstances of a person, I take her to mean, we cannot 'deduce' how they will act because there is always the possibility that they will perform a 'spontaneous' act of will, an act of will that is a cause of action but is itself uncaused—a 'first cause'. And this opens up the possibility that the immortal soul of traditional Christian theology really exists.

Causality and the psyche

The entity whose freedom is at stake is the individual 'psyche', the possession of which is what distinguishes us from the rest of organic life, even higher animals. She calls this the 'real ego' to make clear she is talking about the embodied human being rather than the 'pure ego', the 'quality-less point of radiation of ... [all] experiences' (PPH 134–5), a 'transcendent (*transzendente*) reality' that 'comes to givenness by manifestation in immanent data but never becomes immanent itself' (PPH 23).⁸

Stein calls the psyche a 'mechanism' (PPH 26 et passim). Like any mechanism, it has a particular structure. The most visible part of this structure is the 'stream of consciousness' within which the 'unities' that appear are our encounters with external objects (PPH 280, 8). It would be a mistake, however, to think that consciousness is the totality of the psyche. One reason for this, as Husserl shows, is that the experience of objects presupposes unconscious

processes that generate from an encounter with, for instance, the front of a house, the experience of 'a house' (p. 76 above).

As with any mechanism, the operations of the psyche presuppose a power source, which Stein calls 'lifepower (*Lebenskraft*)'. Unlike Freud, who has only one source of psychic energy, Stein distinguishes several, one of which she calls 'sensate (*sinnlich*)' (PPH 79). Sensate lifepower appears in the form of 'feelings of life (*Lebensgefühl*)', feelings that affect both consciousness and the will. Feelings of life originate in bodily 'life conditions'. If I am feeling weary, then the 'stream of [conscious] life seems to stagnate' so that colours become 'colourless', tones 'hollow', and every colour, every tone, every touch 'hurts'. By contrast, when the weariness disappears (after, perhaps, an excellent night's sleep), the current of life 'surges forward' so that 'everything that emerges carries with it a hint of vigour and joyfulness' (PPH 14). This feeling of vigorous aliveness is, however, to be distinguished from the feeling of 'feverishness' or 'over-alertness (*Überwachheit*)' that can be caused by the presence of danger or by drugs such as caffeine and nicotine (to both of which Stein seems to have been addicted [LJ 338]): 'vigour is like a steadily flowing fountain from which strong, serene waves of experience are billowing' while 'feverishness is like a restless geyser that drives the current of experiencing onward' (PPH 20). (Note that these 'feelings of life' appear to be what were identified in the empathy book as transitory states of the 'soul'.)

What is now clear is that the psyche is not a cause-free zone: there is no question but that psychic events are causally conditioned, in the case of 'feelings of life' conditioned by states of the body. Stein in fact holds that 'every psychic occurrence is causally conditioned (*kausal bedingt*)', which, of course, she immediately adds, decides nothing on the question of 'determination (*Determination*)' (PPH 32).⁹ That my nicotine addiction is giving me a causal 'push' towards yet another cigarette does not mean that I cannot resist the push.

A second kind of lifepower is 'spiritual (*geistig*)' (PPH 79). This appears in the form of 'motivation', something that occurs when one 'spiritual act' is performed *because* another has been performed. The initial act in this sequence is the grasping of a value: the sight of the apple, together with the hedonic value I place on apples, generates in me the desire to eat it. Or—a value higher up the 'objective hierarchy of values' (pp. 81–2 above)—the sight of the beggar together with my 'feeling' for the value of charity generates in me the desire to give him money (PPH 158). A motive, says Stein, does not 'demand' any one particular action: rather, it generates a field of possible actions: if I act within this field, I act 'rationally', if I step outside the field—if, for instance, I seek the company of people I detest—I act irrationally (PPH 42–4). (Notice that, like contemporary thinkers such as Donald Davidson, Stein holds that reasons are, if not causal determinants, at least causal influences: causality and motivation are 'intertwined' [PPH 79].)

Everything we apprehend, says Stein, has a value: 'every fully constituted object [of consciousness] is simultaneously a value object'. The idea of a value-free perception is a theoretical abstraction (PPH 158). Values, value objects, motivate by 'enkindling' (PPH 212) 'attitudes (*Stellungnahmen*)', dispositions to action. Attitudes 'befall' one; one cannot make them happen. I cannot *choose* to admire someone; I may yearn for religious faith but that does not make it happen (PPH 48). So far, then, the situation is looking bleak from the point of view of freedom. States of the body mould consciousness, mould our feelings and moods, and 'motives' cause dispositions to action. So it looks as though the ego, the 'substrate' of all psychic occurrence, is just a node in the nexus of natural causation. Now, however, Stein produces her coup de théâtre in the form of an analysis of willing that she takes over from Dietrich von Hildebrand.¹⁰

Freedom

Attitudes, says Stein, do not compel action because it is up to us whether or not we 'plant our feet' on them. We can either 'adopt' or 'deny' an attitude, allow ourselves to be determined by it or not (PPH 223). A volition, a genuine attempt to realise some state of affairs as opposed to a mere wish to do so, is composed of three elements: an 'attitude [or 'stance'] of will (*Willensstellungnahme*)', which is a 'wanting to do', an 'intention (*Willensvorsatz*)', and finally an 'initiation of action (*Einleiten der Handlung*)'. This last element is the crucial one. It consists in a 'jolt', a '*fiat*' ('just do it'), a 'now'. (One thinks of Hamlet's sudden release from indecision when he decides that '*the play's* the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king'.) Sometimes this 'now' is not present, but in this case, we have 'impulsive' rather than 'free' action. Normally, however, the 'now' is present. Its presence is particularly obvious in conflicts between duty or prudence, on the one hand, and desire, on the other: I may strongly desire to go to a party but my duty to my parents and myself is to finish studying for my exam. Even if I fall prey to desire, I know that I could have withheld the 'now' that turned it into action. We know, in short, that we are capable of being 'masters of our experience (*Herr seines Erlebens*)'. The determinist might object that if I withhold the initiation that must be because of a counter-motive that is 'weightier' than the original motive: if I fail the exam, my career prospects will be irredeemably damaged. But, replies Stein, it is still up to me whether or not 'weight' is going to count as a motive for action: I might choose to act on the 'strength' rather than 'weight' of a motive (PPH 52–60).

Religious implications

The answer, then, to the question of whether we are wholly or only in part enmeshed in the causal network of nature is: only in part. There are free

actions. This, of course, does not mean that human behaviour is completely unpredictable: given a motivational context, we have reasonably good generalisations that allow us to predict how people will behave, and if we know the 'core personality' of an individual, we can make '*insightful* predictions' that are even more reliable (PPH 98). But—though useful in the social sciences—these generalisations about human behaviour can never approach the necessity of the laws of nature, because a pattern of behaviour is always capable of being interrupted by the enacting, or withholding, of a *fiat*.

Bergson, notes Stein, thought of a free action as that which grows out of a personality, as its 'ripe fruit'. But this compatibilist notion is not hers, she emphasises. In the act of initiation, the ego is an uncaused 'first' cause. A 'free' act, in this sense, and a truly 'voluntary' act, are one and the same, a 'spontaneous' realisation of the 'core' of the self (IS 42). An act, however, requires a quantum of power, and so the question arises as to whence the *fiat* derives its power. Experience tells us that it can occur in situations where the necessary lifepower is entirely lacking (PPH 89). Stein provides no example of such a situation, but what she may have in mind is dying for a cause. Captured and tortured by the enemy, every natural inclination directs me towards betraying the secret information and saving my life. The totality of my lifepower is absorbed into the 'attitude' of self-preservation. But still I refuse to betray my comrades and go to my death. Whence, then, the power to generate such a refusal? Somehow the ego generates an 'impulsive power' out of itself: this indicates 'a power source lying beyond the mechanism of the individual personality, which flows into the willing ego and in which the ego is anchored'. The further question of where this non-natural power source within the individual comes from leads, she says, into the 'philosophy of religion' (*ibid.*).

Criticism

Stein's conception of freedom is what we shall see Honneth calling 'reflexive freedom' (pp. 250–1 below), a self-monitoring of one's own inclinations to action. That the ultimate source of freedom lies beyond the realm of natural causation strongly resembles Sartre's conception, which, in turn, comes from Descartes: a conception of the ego as the bare power of 'denial' or 'adoption' (p. 85 above), the power to affirm or deny desires and beliefs. (The evil genius can never deceive Descartes because the Cartesian 'I' always has the power to withhold affirmation from any belief that is not absolutely certain.) And so it is a conception that commits Stein to mind–body dualism. Given her growing responsiveness to religion, this is, of course, the position she wishes to end up with: a philosophy that makes room for the immortal soul. But has she really established that position?

The question of free will, Stein says in her introduction, can be answered 'only on the basis of phenomenology' (PPH 4). The trouble with the phenomenological method, however, is that by definition, it is attentive only to

the phenomena, never to what might or might not be true in phenomena-transcending reality. And this applies to freedom. What follows is that phenomenology, by itself, cannot establish anything more than the reality of the 'feeling' of freedom. Stein's distinction between the various elements of willing is useful in that it gives an account of what it is that constitutes the feeling of freedom. The problem, however, is that to establish the reality of the *feeling* of freedom is not at all to establish the *fact* of freedom: as Stein herself sometimes recognises, the feeling of being an uncaused cause may be illusory: for every act of initiation, there may be a 'true' cause in the realm of natural causation (PPH 24), a natural occurrence of which the 'now' is, in fact, the effect.

Stein does not explicitly respond to this objection. Indeed, as we saw, she admits that he has not 'cut the knot concerning the problem of the free will' (p. 83 above). There is, however, the hint of a response in her remark that 'it is not to be regarded as necessary that the stroking of a catgut of a certain length calls forth a tone of a certain pitch' (PPH 15–6). This seems to anticipate what is known as 'the problem of qualia' in contemporary philosophy of mind. One could, it is sometimes argued, know everything there is to know about the world of scientific causation and yet not know what it is to experience the colour red or the sound of an A played on a violin's open string. Hence, one might conclude, a non-natural bearer of qualia, dualism, remains a live option. What is certain, however, is that for anyone who rejects dualism, Stein's conception of freedom is not available.

Section III: Individual and community

The second part of the *Beiträge*, a radical change of topic, is an essay in communitarian social philosophy. Its central theme is taken—via Scheler—from Ferdinand Tönnies' seminal *Community and Society* (1887): it consists in a sharp distinction between the two, between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and an assertion of the superiority of the former. Tönnies and other conservative German thinkers used the distinction to lament the replacement of traditional social forms by the modern, 'rationalised', in particular Anglo-Saxon, form of society. Nostalgia, however, is absent from Stein's discussion. The reason is that, captured by patriotic war fever during the genesis of the work, Stein believes the ethnic community of the German 'people (*Volk*)' to be alive and well. 'I can no more be in love with Germany', she writes to a friend in February 1917, 'than with myself for ... I myself am it, that is, a part of it'. The state, she continues, is the discipline of a 'self-confident' people (see further pp. 101–2 below). Since Sparta and Rome,

there has never been as strong a consciousness of being a state as there is in Prussia and the new [Bismarck's] German Reich. That is why I consider it out of the question that we will now be defeated.

(SP 7)

Although Stein is clearly convinced that human beings are at their best when they live in community, she provides no continuous argument to that effect. Of the first part of the two-part *Beiträge*, she comments to a friend that she ‘knows very well that [it] is not brought to a conclusion anywhere’ (SP 28), and the same remark applies to the second part. In place of a continuous argument, she again provides a number of interesting answers to a series of questions that must occur to anyone who thinks seriously about what she calls ‘social union (*Verband*)’—Heidegger’s ‘being-with-others’. The questions she discusses are both normative—How do we live together when we are at our best?—and ontological—What is the nature of our social unions and how do they relate to their constituent individuals? More specifically, it seems to me, her project is to provide answers to the following questions:

- (1) What are the basic forms of social union?
- (2) How must individuals be related to each other so as to constitute a community?
- (3) What is the ‘highest’ form of social union?
- (4) Is it legitimate to regard the highest form of social union as a person-like entity?
- (5) Is a social union something over and above its constituent individuals?
- (6) Is the individual a ‘social construction’?
- (7) Could there be community that was not also a society? And could there be a society that was not also a community?

The basic forms of social union

While recognising that actual social unities are almost always ‘mixed’ (PPH 130), Stein follows Weber in distinguishing three basic ideal types: the mass, the *Gesellschaft* (‘society’ or ‘association’), and the *Gemeinschaft* (‘community’).

The mass. The mass (*Masse*) is a ‘psychic’ but not an ‘spiritual’ unity. That is, it is created by a sensory but thought-less union between people. For this reason, it depends on close physical proximity. As Scheler says, in a mass, people are connected by a kind of ‘contagion’ that is made possible by the ‘suggestibility (*Reizbarkeit*)’ of individuals. The contagion has an emotional, but also a (supposedly) factual and normative element: desperate for a ‘conviction’—any conviction—the mass-individual affirms an idea (or at least slogan) because the others do. The mass acts in a coordinated way, not, however, on account of any shared ethical or practical understanding but rather by imitation, somewhat in the manner of a swarm of bees. This makes it ripe for manipulation by an unscrupulous ‘leader’. It is tempting to think of Stein as anticipating Hitler and the Nuremberg rallies, but her principal example of such leadership (contemporary examples are all too easy to call to mind) is, in fact, that of Bolshevism, which she calls an ‘infectious disease of the psyche’ whose so-called ‘ideas’ are like ‘pathogenetic agents’ (memes), which are

‘implanted’ in the subject ‘without any logical reasoning’ (PPH 243–4). At one point, she offers ‘proletariat’ as a synonym for ‘mass’ (PPH 290).

The Gesellschaft. The natural translation of *Gesellschaft* is ‘society’. In German writers of Stein’s traditionalist cast of mind, ‘society’ is negatively contrasted with ‘community’, but because this connotation of ‘mere society’ is lost in English, I shall leave *Gesellschaft* untranslated. Following Tönnies, Stein describes a *Gesellschaft* as a ‘rational’, deliberately thought-out entity (a business enterprise is, in German, a *Gesellschaft*), the product of a ‘deal’ between people who have a specific purpose in mind. In a pure *Gesellschaft*, the relation between individuals is of subject to object: the others are simply ‘objects’ that can potentially thwart one’s interests: they are, at best, ‘instruments’ one can deploy to serve those interests. In Stein’s fairly standard conception, *Gesellschaft* corresponds to a polity as conceived by Hobbes and is, for Scheler and like-minded protagonists of the ‘ideas of 1914’ (GTC II 149), almost perfectly personified by the English. *Gesellschaften* are liable to collapse into tyrannies since the purest example of ‘*Gesellschaft* man’ is the demagogue who wishes to reduce *everyone* to his instrument, to a manipulable mass (PPH 131). (This rehearses Plato’s objection to democracy: it is liable to degenerate into tyranny.)

The Gemeinschaft. Unlike a *Gesellschaft*, a community is unplanned, a ‘natural, organic union of people’: while *Gesellschaften* are ‘established’, *Gemeinschaften* ‘grow’ (IS 4). In brief, the difference between the two is that in a community, one treats the other not as object but rather as a subject, a subject possessing an ‘inwardness’ similar to one’s own. And so, rather than seeking to manipulate him, one ‘lives with him’ in the ‘solidarity’ of mutual care. Unlike the ‘wary posture’ one needs to adopt in a *Gesellschaft*, in the social ‘trust’ (PPH 260) created by community one can live with ‘artless’ spontaneity. Whereas the leader of a *Gesellschaft* is likely to be a tyrant, the leader of a community is likely to be a ‘man of the people’ (PPH 130–2). (One thinks of Hans Sachs, the beloved, poet-cobbler elder of late medieval Nuremberg.)

Individual and community

Not every organised collection of individuals is a community. What, then, in detail, are the relations that must obtain between individuals for them to constitute a community?

The basic phenomenon of the individual psyche, we have seen, is the ‘stream of experience’. Something similar obtains in the case of community: individuals belong together in a community when there is a ‘flowing together’ (*zusammenströmen*) of the individual flow of experience into a common life’ in a way that constitutes a shared ‘spiritual-psychic structure’. This shared structure may occupy only a relatively superficial layer in the life of an individual member of a community, leaving the ‘core’ of the person untouched, as is typically the case with respect to ‘the scientific community’. On the other hand,

it may constitute almost the totality of that core (PPH 271). Communities, in other words, form a continuum: they can be more and less deeply rooted in the lives of their members.

Unlike the 'mechanically' constituted *Gesellschaft*, a community, recall, is an organism. It follows that one belongs to the common life of the community to the extent that one lives and acts *as* a member—a 'cell' (SP 7)—of the community, acts, that is, for the realisation of communal goals. To the extent one so acts, the actor 'is no longer the discrete individual but rather the community in him and through him' (PPH 272). When one feels, thinks, and acts as a member of the community, the subject of the act is no longer the individual but rather the community that acts 'through' him or her. When, as an astrophysicist, I make a novel astronomical observation, this is not some private acquisition: rather, it is the scientific community that acquires this new knowledge. And when I read Little Red Riding Hood or Sleeping Beauty to my children, it is the community that, through me, initiates them into *its* folk tradition (PPH 149).

Stein calls those who frequently act as members of the community its 'bearers'. No one, she recognises, is required to act all the time as a bearer. We all have a drive to 'make the most' of our lives, to develop our potentialities, and that requires an independent area of personal life. Sometimes the drive to self-realisation may detach one from communal goals. One might, for instance, be an artist born into a family of merchants so that in following one's bent, one's goals would be positively frowned on by one's community. Such independence might well be a good thing, continues Stein, a directing of communal norms in a new and healthier direction. (A healthy community needs, as it were, the random mutation that allows it to develop in a new and perhaps necessary direction.) And even when we do act as members of the community, we do so in personal ways. We all know the story of Sleeping Beauty, but (at least in pre-Disney days) we 'intuit' the design of her castle according to our own, personal imagination. A hypothetical person who *always* acted as a member of the community (a German who is so 'typically German' as to be a caricature) would not be an individual person at all since they would have no individual personality (PPH 279–80).

Not every member of a community acts frequently, or even ever, *as* a member of the community. Even a majority may never, or only infrequently, so act. They are fellow travellers who follow communal norms but without inner conviction or commitment. If everyone were a fellow traveller, there would be no communal 'core' and hence no community. A community must, then, have 'bearers' of its core, of its 'soul'. The larger this group, the more secure is the 'substance' of the community. But even in the absence of such a group, a single strong leader can bear the substance of the community on his or her shoulders alone (one thinks of Jacinda Ardern's remarkable ability to persuade almost all of New Zealand's 'team of five million' to do what was required to

extinguish the coronavirus in 2020–21). In this case, however, the substance of the community is less secure, since it may not survive the death of the leader (PPH 280–2).

Higher and lower forms of social union

Stein presents her three basic social forms—*Masse*, *Gesellschaft*, and *Gemeinschaft*—as if they were three normatively equal social forms. But this is, of course, not her view. The three forms constitute a hierarchy, with mass at the bottom (IS 2) and community at the top. Why should there be such a hierarchy? Why, first of all, is ‘mass’ the least desirable social form?

As a member of a mass, we have seen, one is not a free agent. Rather, one is controlled by ‘infectious’ propaganda and is likely to become subject to out-right dictatorship. Such a life may well be despicable, but might one not still be happy as a member of a mass? Not so, says Stein. Although members of the mass robotically mirror each other’s behaviour (as one man, they all perform the Hitler salute), they do so without any ‘inner unity’. Within the mass, there is no ‘common life’ so that individuals ‘do not go out of themselves but remain entirely closed up within themselves’ (PPH 243). The mass, in other words, is, as David Reisman’s eponymous book puts it, a ‘lonely crowd’. One acts robotically, but one is not a robot: one’s need for fellowship with others is unsatisfied, one is condemned to an ‘absolute loneliness’ (PPH 285).

Unlike the mass, the *Gesellschaft* is a ‘mental (*geistige*) and personal union’, the product of ‘optional acts of solitary persons’ (PPH 225). But because one’s social environment is one of atomic ‘objects’ rather than ‘subjects’, one is, again, ‘absolutely alone, a “windowless monad”’ (PPH 129). There is no social fellowship, ‘trust’ is lacking (PPH 260).

And so the reason *Gemeinschaft* is the highest social form rests on the ‘release of individuals from their natural loneliness’ (PPH 273). Within community, individuals ‘reach out beyond themselves towards a complete unification’ with others. ‘Complete community’ Stein adds, however,

cannot be achieved by any earthly community—cannot in principle, not just accidentally. However, the possibility of complete community becomes insightfully given on the basis of what can be achieved in the midst of the earthly community towards overcoming absolute loneliness. Consequently, an inner incompleteness clings to every earthly community, and an inclination beyond itself.

(PPH 285)

Even though Stein has not yet converted to Catholicism, this, clearly, is religious thinking. Our yearning for complete union with others cannot be satisfied ‘on earth’, but the experience of its partial satisfaction in earthly community gives us the hope of its complete satisfaction in heaven.

Why is loneliness 'natural' and why can it never be completely overcome on earth? Stein does not say. But the theme of the 'curse of individuation' runs through a great deal of German thought and so she perhaps takes it as already understood by her readers. It appears in, *inter alia*, Hölderlin's view of bliss as unification with 'the All', Schopenhauer's account of 'salvation' as transcendence of the *principium individuationis*, and Freud's 'nirvana principle', the yearning to escape the 'anxiety' of individuality and return to the undifferentiated existence of the womb.

Though never perfect, then, community sits at the top of Stein's hierarchy of social forms. Following Scheler (GTC II 143), however, she argues for another hierarchy, a hierarchy within the category of community.

Communities, or at least entities referred to as communities, come in all shapes and sizes: among Stein's examples are scientific researchers, high school classes, political parties, families, religions, nations, and peoples. Within this motley collection she distinguishes between, as I put it, deep and shallow communities, as well as between genuine and notional communities, the latter being cases where 'community' needs to be taken with a 'grain of salt' (PPH 275) ('the business community', 'the criminal fraternity'). As I have indicated, her paradigm of community is a 'nation' or 'people', so that the notion of community will likely become more attenuated the further one moves from those paradigms.

Stein's hierarchy of communities is a hierarchy of genuine communities. At the bottom of this hierarchy is Scheler's 'life-community' (*Lebensgemeinschaft*), which, she says, he distinguishes from community as a 'personal' entity, community as a 'collective person' (PPH 195).¹¹ A life-community is the kind of community that obtains between children or even the higher animals. In it, individuals act as constituent parts of an organic whole (the division of labour is presumably what distinguishes the life-community from the robotic 'mass') but do so instinctively rather than as a conscious, voluntary act. The highest mode of community, by contrast, is

the union of purely free persons who are united in (*mit*) their innermost "personal" or ensouled (*seelisch*) life, and each of whom feels responsible for both himself and for the community.

As Scheler puts it, the life-community stands to the highest form of community as body stands to soul. Below this highest form (I am omitting some further forms in Stein's fine-grained typology) comes the community in which only a portion of the members have this free and self-conscious commitment to the life of the community, 'perhaps a nation in which a national consciousness is alive only within certain circles' (Stein may have in mind the George Kreis, the group of high-minded, nationalist thinkers devoted to the poet Stephan George). And below this comes the community in which 'although there is

a common living out of a unitary spirit, that spirit is not determined by any person living in that community’—a community living out of a tradition that threatens to become ossified, it would seem (PPH 276–8).

Community as a person

The highest form of community is, then, a ‘collective person’. But is it legitimate to extend the concept of a person from individuals to a group of individuals?

Following the European settlement established by the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, it became customary to think of nation states as ‘great men’: the frontispiece of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651) pictured the state as a huge man made up of thousands of ordinary-sized human beings. But is this anything more than a metaphor? What kind of similarities exist between individuals and communities? Stein enumerates a number of them.

First, communities can perceive objects and facts about the world. If a sentry perceives a gleam of light across no man’s land (the trenches of the First World War are omnipresent in the Stein’s book), and there is good communication within the platoon, the platoon as a whole can be said to have seen the light (PPH 147). Second, communities can have non-perceptual forms of knowledge: a scientific researcher is guided in his or her research by the accumulated knowledge of the scientific community and what they add to that knowledge, we have seen, becomes the possession of the community as a whole (148–9). With Galileo’s telescopic observations, *we* came to know that geocentric astronomy is false.

Communities can also experience emotions. It can happen, for instance, that the grief I feel at the loss of the leader of our unit is *our* grief rather than merely *my* grief. This is not the same as empathising with the grief of one or several others: in empathy what I empathise with is still an individual’s grief. But in the case of the fallen leader, the intentional object of the emotional state is *our* loss. (Nations, in particular, can be said to grieve as a whole. The funeral march in the second movement of Elgar’s Second Symphony expresses *England’s* grief over the death of Edward VII, and, I suppose, Elton John’s ‘Candle in the Wind’ may have done the same with respect to the death of Princess Diana.) Of course, the ‘colouring’ and intensity of grief is likely to vary from individual to individual—different ‘noetic’ qualities may accompany the same ‘noematic’ content, as Stein puts it, dutifully deploying Husserl’s technical terminology. And neither is it necessary that every member of the group experiences either personal or communal grief (PPH 134–9).

Given that communities can experience emotions, it is obvious that the concept of motivation also applies to them. In belonging to the community of scientists, for instance, ‘I find myself inserted into a great network of motivation’—to find a coronavirus vaccine, for instance. All intellectual activity requires emotional stimulation and motivation, though different motives may

engage different agents in the same enterprise: some 'peoples' may value scientific truth for its own sake, others for the technical and economic benefits it is likely to produce. And, of course, nations can have all sorts of motives for going to war with each other: religious, political, or economic (PPH 169–72).

As with individuals, the functioning of communities depends on 'lifepower' (p. 84 above). The ascent and descent of nations (the topic of Spengler's contemporaneous *Decline of the West* [GTC II chap. 4]) depends on fluctuations in communal lifepower. A decrease in power may result in a nation entering a state of 'slumber'; an increase in power in a 'multiform zest for action' (PPH 201)—Stein probably has the Italian Renaissance or fifth-century Athens in mind. As with individuals, lifepower may be of either sensory or spiritual origin. Some nations, lacking the spiritual power required by cultural achievement, expend their energy expanding over the globe. (This appears to be a Scheler-inspired allusion to the alleged low commercialism of imperialist English *Händler* [traders] in contrast to the cultural 'inwardness' of German *Helden* [heroes] [GTC II 150].)

The lifepower of a community may derive from a subjective source. The enthusiasm of a group of friends may bring a project to completion. Even if I initially lack such enthusiasm, I may be swept along by my friends. The lifepower of a community may derive from a source outside the community: a high school may function well on account of the natural enthusiasm of the students but it may also derive its enthusiasm by the arrival of a new teacher who treats and teaches the students as subjects rather than objects. Similarly, the hatred shown towards us by the nation with whom we are at war may produce in us the vigour of a counter-hatred (PPH 206).

Alternatively, the lifepower of a community may derive from objective sources, sources that pertain to what is experienced rather than the experiencer. Values, which are always encountered as embodied in people and things (p. 84 above), are sources of lifepower because they 'enkindle' action-prompting 'attitudes'. The beauty of the landscape inspires me to artistic creation, the joyous sunshine of the new day generates renewed vigour, the epic hero (who may be fictional) particularly when his life is eloquently told, fills me with admiration and the disposition to emulate him. Provided that the 'community of the people' (*Volksgemeinschaft*) is receptive, its ethical heritage is an 'inexhaustible fountain from which it can always draw new powers'. If, on the other hand, the community's attention has been diverted from cultural to commercial goals, it will derive no such power (219–22).

A final similarity between individuals and communities is that psychological and moral predicates apply to both. Like individuals, communities can possess 'characters' or 'personalities', which, together with their 'souls', constitute the 'core' of their personalities. When we speak, for example, of Roman shrewdness, French 'esprit', American pragmatism, or German thoughtfulness, when we call a nation brutal or ruthless, we wish to characterise the nation as a

whole rather than generalise about the characteristics of the majority of individuals in it. A nation can be brutal and ruthless even when the majority of its citizens are good-natured and peaceable (PPH 225–38). (Statements about the ‘character’ of nations are not, therefore, description of its ‘social character’ in Fromm’s sense of the term [p. 204 below].)

Social ontology

Are communities real or are they what Bertrand Russell calls ‘logical constructions’? Are they ineliminable elements of the social world or merely useful fiction, talk about which can be translated into talk about their constituents alone? Stein’s answer is given in the title of Chapter II of Part II of the *Beiträge*: ‘Community as a Reality: Its Ontic Composition’ (PPH 196). Further indication of her realism about communities (and other social entities as well) is given in her remarks about the ‘soul of the nation’: if the phrase can only be understood ‘with a grain of salt’, she writes, then there is no national community (PPH 275). Of course, she says, when we look around, all we see are individuals (just as the tourist sees only the colleges, not ‘Oxford University’ itself). But in crisis situations such as war, the community suddenly becomes tangible as a unified pattern of thought and action, similar to the pattern that reveals the character of an individual. Communities can, moreover, ‘slumber’, which they do when all members are distracted from communal concerns. A slumbering community does not cease to exist and can, at a later date, be restored to ‘wakefulness’. And communities can, of course, persist through a complete change of membership. Stein even seems to consider it to be possible that a community has only one member (PPH 195–6). Perhaps she has Hölderlin’s *An die Verwandten* (To the Relatives) in mind in which the lonely poet laments that while he belongs to the community of the Germans, his ‘relatives’ have not yet joined him in it. In general, then, reductionism is rejected by Stein: communities are irreducible elements in her social ontology.

Is the individual a social construction?

The relation between the character of a community and the characters of its constituent members is, says Stein, reciprocal. On the one hand, the character of the community is dependent on the character of individuals: only, as we have seen, if there are at least some ‘leading’ individuals willing to exercise their freedom so as to live as members of the community can the highest kind of community come into being. On the other hand, individuals can develop qualities of character such as pride or humility only in social interaction so that, typically, individuals develop into a ‘type’ that is characteristic of their nation or class within it, and is not intelligible without reference to it. (Unlike mere wrongdoing, ‘sin’, defiance of God’s will, is unintelligible without reference to

an Abrahamic culture.) The community can stunt the development of distinctive features of the individual—the artist born into a family of merchants, once again—and it can allow a potentiality to blossom, which, without it, might have merely ‘slumbered’. The community can, however, never produce genuine character formations unless their ‘roots’ are already present in the individual—without such roots only pseudo-formations develop. Importantly, moreover, the individual always has the power to ‘nip in the bud’ character traits that are typical of his or her community but which they do not wish to acquire. Essentially, then, as is required by her view that the second-person image is not constitutive of the self (p. 79 above), Stein is an anti-social-constructionist. Society can provide an arena in which the individual can develop his or her innate ‘core’, but the origin and control of that development lies always with the individual (PPH 264–71).

Could there be a *Gemeinschaft* without a *Gesellschaft* or a *Gesellschaft* without a *Gemeinschaft*?

Gemeinschaft, *Gesellschaft*, and *Masse* are, we saw, idealisations. In practice, most social unions are a mixture of all three (p. 88 above). But not all. An ethnic community, the ‘community of a people (*Volks-gemeinschaft*)’, can exist without the formal structures of a *Gesellschaft*: the Polish people existed throughout the nineteenth century as a cultural entity in spite of being divided into German-ruled Poland (where Stein grew up) and Russian-ruled Poland (IS 16). And of course, the Jewish people existed for millennia without any formal recognition of their identity.

Communities, then, can exist as ‘pure’ communities. On the other hand, claims Stein, there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ *Gesellschaft*. Her argument for the claim that ‘a pure *Gesellschaft* that is not to some degree a community cannot exist’ is the following. In the notionally pure *Gesellschaft*, recall, the ‘subject-subject’ relation is replaced by the ‘subject-object’ relation. The other is either an obstacle to or instrument for the realisation of one’s goals (p. 89 above). To use the other as an instrument, however, requires one to assess their competence for a given task—and that requires understanding them as a subject. Indeed, to understand that there is a basis for a *Gesellschaft*, that there is a common purpose, requires one to understand the other as a subject. Even the most ruthless political leader must understand people’s emotional responses to threats and promises to induce them to cooperate with his schemes (PPH 225–9).

A behaviourist would object that one can understand another’s instrumental potentialities purely by observing stimulus–response patterns. Leaving this aside, however, the argument still seems to me to be flawed. It is true that to use you as an instrument, I must understand your inner strengths and weaknesses,

just as I need to understand the inner capacities of a chisel or lawnmower. But to understand is not the same as being sympathetically disposed towards—recall that ‘solidarity’ is an essential element of community. The psychopathic torturer who has an exquisite sense of the pain he is inflicting on his victim is, unfortunately, a human possibility. A further problem with the claim that every *Gesellschaft* presupposes a communal basis is that it seems to contradict her view that, while not desirable, a state—and therefore a *Gesellschaft*—with no basis in shared community is a possibility, indeed an actuality (p. *** below).

Section IV: Political philosophy

Although first published in 1925, Stein’s *An Investigation Concerning the State* (IS) was completed in 1921. It is, she says, a continuation of the *Beiträge*, ‘pick[ing] up’ where the earlier work leaves off (IS 2) and therefore an essentially pre-conversion work. As with the empathy book and the *Beiträge*, rather than providing a single continuous argument, Stein poses and provides answers to a number of questions: questions about the state, and, in particular, about the relation between state and community. Her principal questions seem to me the following:

- (1) What is the state, what is its ‘essence’?
- (2) What is the origin of the state?
- (3) How should the state be internally organised?
- (4) Should the state be a nation state?
- (5) Does the state require a defined territory?
- (6) What, if anything, is the justification of the state? Is it, in particular, the agent of morality or of historical progress?

The ‘essence’ of the state

What is the ‘essence’ (IS 9) of the state? Stein’s answer is that it is what Aristotle calls ‘self-sufficiency’ (IS 138) and she ‘sovereignty’: state and sovereignty are, she says, ‘equivalent’ (IS 15).

Communities come in all sorts of sizes: at one end of the continuum are families and friendship circles; at the other, the ‘community’ of all human beings. The state, ‘civic community’ (*Staatsgemeinschaft*) comes somewhere in the middle. It must be the ‘master’ of its own life (IS 9). This means that it must be the one and only lawgiver. There must, that is, be a body within the state, the function of which is to legislate and to govern (IS 61–2, 71). Individuals within the state must stand to it in the relation of governed to government. As the master of its own life, the state must have the means to such mastery, means that boil down to ‘force’. The state must have a military to protect it from external threats and a monopoly on violence within the state to protect

it from internal threats. If its laws are defied by some internal group, the state is dissolved from within. If its laws come to be determined and controlled by some external body, it is dissolved from without; were there to be a world state, it would be the only state in existence. Sovereignty, however, does not mean that there can be no international law: it means, merely, that such law must rest on the 'self-limitation' of the state (IS 9–11). Stein thus agrees with Carl Schmitt that while there can be inter-national law, there can be no ('positive' as opposed to moral) supra-national law (GTC II 179–88).

The origin of the state

How did the state come into being? According to the 'dominant' contract theory, says Stein, the state emerged from the 'state of nature' as the result of an 'act of will' (IS 4), an agreement between rational individuals: since the state of nature is, as Hobbes famously put it, 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short', a condition of 'war all against all', it was in everyone's interest to cede to a sovereign a monopoly on violence: while everyone sacrificed a degree of freedom, in return, they greatly increased their security and prosperity. On this theory, the state counts as a *Gesellschaft* rather than a *Gemeinschaft*, the product of an intelligent, creative act rather than a 'natural' organic growth (p. 89 above).

Stein claims that this account is inconsistent with the facts of European history. (Hobbes, in fact, probably never intended his narrative as historical truth [see p. 229 below].) For a start, she observes, what preceded the state were not isolated individuals but rather tribes, tribes with established practices and customs, but customs that were observed instinctively rather than as the result of acts of government. Government, and hence the state, first appeared as a conquering tribe merges with the customs of the conquered, simply taking over the leading social roles without any formal treaty, as would be required for establishing a *Gesellschaft*. Instinctively observed customs now become acts of government, enforced where necessary by the military power of the conquerors (IS 5). A defender of contract theory might suggest that something more formal, more literate, than mere conquest is required for the establishment of a genuine state. But I think that Stein can incorporate this point. Consider, for example, the Norman conquest of England. The Domesday Book did not institute a new social order. What it did, rather, was to provide a survey of land holdings throughout the country and therefore of what taxes had been owed to the crown under the reign of William the Conqueror's predecessor. Having a stronger literary tradition, the Normans were able to articulate the structure of a state: but it was the articulation of what was already there rather than the creation of something new.

The case of the Norman conquest represents Stein's understanding of the original and typical appearance of the state: she quotes Schleiermacher as designating 'the transition from non-state to state as the explication of customs

into laws and thus as a transition from unconsciousness into consciousness of community' (IS 5 n. 14). If a state has this kind of genealogy, then it is a *Gemeinschaft*: the self-conscious rational thought necessary to its coming into being (to making it a *Gesellschaft* as well as a *Gemeinschaft*) is not the forging of a social contract but rather the 'rational reconstruction' of the fabric of a pre-existing social entity (IS 4).

If the state emerges in the manner Stein describes, then—this is the crucial point—the political is the pre-political or, as Jaspers calls it, the 'supra-political' (p. 66 above). Stein says that the issue of how states in general come into being is not an 'either-or' question (IS 4–5). A state *could* have its origin in a creative act of will (most states in the Middle East were the product of the stroke of a colonial pen, though not of course, of a contract between their citizens). But this is not the usual way. Nor, we shall see her arguing, is it the best. Without a communal base, the security, indeed the very purpose, of the state is in doubt; the best, the 'healthy' (IS 67) state will be not just a *Gesellschaft*, but also the articulation of a *Gemeinschaft*.

A bad political theory, Stein observes, can be bad for the state. If the human rights insisted on by liberals are taken to extremes, they undermine the sovereignty of the state (IS 141–4). She does not explicitly identify contract theory as such a theory, but a version of it, libertarianism, can certainly be argued to be bad for the state—for its capacity to manage a coronavirus pandemic, for instance.

The internal organisation of the state

The state, says Stein (ignoring the possibility of a totalitarian state), does not demand the whole of an individual's life: it allows citizens to live personal lives that have nothing to do with the state's 'agenda'. For the many, it is sufficient that they fulfil their functions within it and abide by its laws. They do not need to have a conscious sense of their membership of the state, or even take a positive attitude to it, though if their attitude is actively negative (their attitude to 'Washington', 'the swamp'), the state is in danger. It is, however, constitutive of the state (as it is of 'deep' communities in general [p. 90 above]), that there are 'bearers' of the state, those for whom the wellbeing of the 'civic community' is their highest priority—the purpose of their lives. (If one wishes to become a politician, nothing should be more important to one than the good of one's country.) As Plato and Aristotle saw, the very best form of government is absolute (and benevolent) monarchy, best in that, by eliminating the possibility of factionalism, it most effectively secures the unity and integrity of the state. The next best is aristocracy, rule by a select circle of bearers (IS 32–5).

Steeped in classical political philosophy, this view is, of course, explicitly 'elitist' (IS 32) and highly anti-democratic. Parliamentary democracy, says Stein, endangers the state: since every change in governing party represents

the attempt to force the state to conform to a new political theory, it results in nothing but confusion and weakness (IS 143–4). Someone intent on presenting Stein as a democrat might point to her admiration of Walther Rathenau (SP 24), the Jewish democratic Weimar politician, and to the fact that during 1918–19 she was, together with her mother and sister, an active member of the German Democratic Party. It is, moreover, true that she acknowledges that, given the size and complexity of the modern state, government by ‘one pair of hands’ is impossible. The modern state, she says, requires a broader base than monarchy or aristocracy, which make the ‘idea’ of democracy, according to which ‘all citizens are bearers of the life of the state’ (IS 34) attractive as providing the state with its ‘most secure grounding’. But, she continues, the idea of democracy

places demands on the totality of the citizens that—when measured against the average calibre of human beings—are set so high that they are always very unlikely to be fulfilled. The danger of deterioration is very great in this form of the state.

(IS 34)

Stein, then, is no democrat. As she writes in *Life in a Jewish Family*, her teenage years were spent freeing herself from the ‘liberal ideas’ with which she had grown up, so that she arrived in adulthood with ‘a positive, nearly conservative, view of the state’ (JF 192–3). Why, then, her membership of the Democratic Party? Writing about her future brother-in-law, a passionate monarchist recently demobilised from the army, she remarks that, overcoming his shock at discovering both his fiancée and his mother to be members of the Democratic Party, he joined too. ‘The elections left him with no alternative but to choose it as well, for, as a Jew, he could expect no sympathy any further to the political right’ (JF 231). And so it seems clear that, in the face of, since 1916, ever-increasing right-wing antisemitism, Stein’s own membership of the Party was a matter, not of philosophical or political conviction, but rather of self-preservation.

What, then, are we to identify as Stein’s view of the best form of the government of the modern state? She seems, in the end, to have no view. Monarchy is the best form of government in principle, but the modern state is too big for that. Democracy is theoretically the best form but in practice would be a disaster. The conclusion would seem to be that we need smaller, monarchical states, but Stein never makes that explicit.

A glaring deficiency in Stein’s critique of democracy is the claim that it requires everyone to be a ‘bearer’ of the state. This is, of course, at best true only of the direct democracy of the ancient polis. The most that the ‘idea’ of modern, representative democracy entails is the notion of everyone voting. As with an aristocratic state, all it requires is that there be *some* ‘bearers’ of the democracy.

State and community

A state is not the same thing as a ‘people (*Volk*)’, as an ‘ethnic community’. Each, as we saw, can exist without the other—the Poles lack of their own state during the nineteenth century (p. 96 above) probably strengthened their sense of peoplehood (as the lack of a German state prior to the second Reich of 1870 increased the sense of a shared Germanness). And the definitional role of sovereignty in relation to the state makes clear, says Stein, that the state can exist without any basis in a people: a state may embrace many peoples, or none at all (IS 16). That, however, is by no means to say that the state *should* exist without a unique people as its ethnic base: Stein, as we shall see, is convinced that it should not.

We have seen what a state is, but what exactly is an ‘ethnic community (*Volksgemeinschaft*)’?¹² As with all communities, an ethnic community is bound together by a shared ‘current of life’ (IS 22). In contrast, however, to other communities such as a primitive tribe or a family, an ethnic community has a unique culture that emerges from a unitary spiritual ‘centre’ or ‘soul’,¹³ that expresses itself in a homogeneous cosmos of spiritual goods such as those of the arts and sciences.¹⁴ This ‘spiritual cosmos’ is grounded in an hierarchical ‘world of values’ that defines for it its self-perfection, values which, as shared, produce ‘solidarity’ within the community (IS 30–6). An ethnic community must be not only culturally creative but also the determinant of its own unique culture: ‘cultural autonomy’ stands to a people as sovereignty to the state. Its unique culture endows a people with a unique ‘personality’ (IS 24).

‘The state’, Stein writes to a friend in 1917,

is a self-confident people that disciplines its functions... . The increase of such self-assurance appears to be bound up with an increased developmental tendency, organization appears to be a sign of interior strength and that people is most perfect ... which is most a state.

(SP 7)

Although an ethnic community can exist without a state, it is much better off with one: ‘the people as a “personality” with creative distinctiveness begs for an organisation that secures for it a life according to its own lawfulness’ (IS 24). It needs the institutions of the state to defend it against external domination, but even more, Stein suggests, it needs the state to defend it against internal disruption. As an individual needs spiritual discipline to protect himself against unruly and unwanted desires, so a people needs the state to defend itself against those same unruly impulses that for the most part, dominate the lives of the people (IS 69).

It is, of course, not just any kind of state that a people needs but rather a state that is congruent with, expressive of, its inner nature. A great deal of

communal life is made up of ‘habits (*Gewohnheiten*)’. When these have endured for a considerable length of time—in the judicial sphere they appear as ‘common law’—they become ‘customs’. These are ‘natural creations’ in the sense that they do not owe their existence to conscious acts of will performed at identifiable moments in time. Habits happen; they are not created (IS 110–11). (Notice that the reliability of habit is central to social trust and ‘solidarity’, to feeling ‘at home’ in one’s community.)

Generally, and properly, the laws and institutions of the state represent a conscious and deliberate ‘articulation (*herausbilden*)’ of the customs and institutions of the ethnic community. This is the realm of freedom impinging on the unconscious life of a people (IS 69). Properly, the civic community is, to repeat, a ‘rational reconstruction’ of the fabric of the ethnic community, as in my earlier example of the Norman conquest (p. 98 above).

* * *

The *Volksgemeinschaft*, then, needs the state for the sake of its integrity and self-preservation. But what about the converse: does the state, for the same reason, need to be grounded in ethnic community? Does it need to be a ‘nation state’?—a ‘nation’, says Stein, is a people that not only has a unique ‘soul’ but is conscious of and ‘cultivates’ it (IS 26).¹⁵ Certainly, concedes Stein, there can be a state with no ethnic basis: the ‘national or ethnic state (*Nationalstaat oder Volksstaat*)’ is only one type of state. Yet as Aristotle observes, states are held together more by *philia* than by justice,¹⁶ by ‘brotherliness’ or, as Stein translates *philia*, ‘consciousness of community (*Gemeinschaftsbewusstsein*)’. Though this does not belong to the essence of the state, if a state is secure in its existence, ‘a ribbon of community’ winds around its citizens (IS 20). A state that is not the articulation of ethnic community will be one in which the only bond is ‘loyalty (*Loyalität*)’ to the laws and duties of the state (IS 24).

‘Loyalty’ looks very much like what Habermas (GTC I 57) and Honneth (pp. 260–1 below) call ‘constitutional patriotism’: an emotional commitment to the abstract set of rules that allows a plurality of ethnic and other communities to inhabit the same ethnically neutral state. Stein, however, has a very low opinion of—in effect—constitutional patriotism. As conceived in Habermas’ fashion, she believes, the state

would have no inner justification of its existence: it would always have the character of something hollow and ephemeral. It might perhaps be held together by authoritarian control but would have no inner gravity of its own.

(IS 24)

Elsewhere, she is even more scathing about constitutional patriotism:

a state without the organizing principle of an ethnic personality ... strikes one as strangely unsettling (*unheimlich*). It has something of the machine about it, a

machine that requires human life for it to be put into motion and kept in motion, yet does not come alive itself, and remains indifferent to the life it has taken over. The state has no soul, and no soul-driven productivity, which is why it is amazing and incongruous... when someone professes soulful devotion to it.

(IS 35)

I think the force of this critique is that, just as one cannot love a machine, so one cannot love the non-ethnic state, which means that the idea of 'patriotism', of emotional commitment to it, is a *fata morgana*.

The solidity of the state, a 'healthy political system' (IS 67), needs, then, to be founded on ethnic community—not just ethnic community but 'nationhood', self-conscious ethnicity. Hence, says Stein, it is a bad lookout for the state if displays of ethnic identity are blocked. With a people, there is a 'productive soul' that 'nourishes' the souls of individuals. Hence, it is

much more natural and understandable for somebody to love his people and to love the state only derivatively as its external modality than for the state to be loved directly for its own sake.

(IS 36)

This, however, by no means precludes individuals and communities of different ethnicities from living within the same well-grounded state. While it is preferable for a people to have its own state

that it should take the form of a state is not an absolute necessity. All a people really needs is a civic organisation that allows it to follow its inner lawfulness. Danger arises only when its ethnic personality conflicts with the laws of the state.

(IS 25)

Stein is clearly thinking of the 'Jewish question' in this passage. Her answer to the question of the place of the Jews in German society is that it is fine for the Jews to find, in the state, an opportunity to live according to their own customs within its borders. It would not, however, be fine for a contained ethnic community to engage in practices that conflict with the laws of the state. If one thinks of this in terms of the currently strained relations between Western liberal states and their contained Moslem communities, Stein's position would allow the wearing of hijabs but would defend the right of satirists to draw cartoons of Mohammed.

The best state is, then, the nation state. But within its borders, other ethnic communities can express their distinct 'personalities' provided they do not conflict with the laws of the state. Those laws, however, reflect the customs of the ethnic community whose state it is: among the ethnic communities inhabiting the state, one is preeminent. What this amounts to, I think, is the affirmation of the idea of a *Leitkultur* (leading culture), a term introduced into

public discourse in Germany by Friedrich Merz, the then-leader of the Christian Democratic Union, in 2000. A healthy state allows unassimilated—and perhaps asylum-seeking—guest communities to reside within its borders, but the state as a whole must always be the expression of the ethnic community whose state it is. If one applies this idea to, for instance, Israel, what follows is that Israel can accept Arab citizens but must always remain a Jewish state. Needless to say, such ideas are, these days, highly controversial.

Can a state that initially lacks a leading culture *become* an ethnic nation state? Stein never clearly recognises this possibility. If, perhaps through conquest,

the nation state acquires new segments of population, then either it loses its character as a nation state or else, in cases where the new elements are assimilated, the assimilation can bring about so severe a modification of the original ethnic character that one cannot speak of transformation any more, but rather of a *new formation*’.

(IS 29)

This seems to be hostile not only to imperialism but also to assimilating, as opposed to showing hospitality to, new ethnic elements.¹⁷ But this misses the fact that it is possible to *become*, for instance, German, to acquire an ethnic character through, as I have argued elsewhere (GTC II Afterword), *Bildung*, formation of character, first and foremost, through education. This is one of Stein’s blind spots. Although, as we shall see, she is aware of the moral importance of *Bildung*, she does not seem to have realised its nation-preserving potential.

State and land

Must a state possess an area of land over which it exercises its sovereignty? In contrast to Carl Schmitt who makes the exercise of sovereignty over a defined territory part of the definition of the state (GTC II 166, 180), Stein thinks it is not an absolute necessity. One can imagine a state made up of disembodied minds (a state of angels, for instance), a non-spatial state. For embodied beings such as ourselves, however, a state must have a sovereign territory. (With sea-level rise, however, one wonders about the possibility of a floating state.) A state made up of people with phantom bodies might need land on which to secure the unhindered unfolding of their visual appearance (they mentally project holographic images of themselves, one can imagine), but it would need to be land of no particular quality. For ‘persons of the human type’, however, a certain material quality is required of the sovereign territory of the state. One cannot live in pure desert or on pure ice (IS 127–8).¹⁸ This is the point at which ‘economy (*Wirtschaft*)’ appears as an essential part of the structure of the human type of state. Originally, ‘economy’ meant no more than the satisfaction of needs, and because the appropriate method of satisfaction is determined by the nature of the land—of, more generally, the natural environment—the

original direction of an economy is influenced by the land. And because an economy influences the type of person who lives and works within it, there is at least a grain of truth in the idea that the type of person characteristic of a given community is a 'product of nature': people in difficult environments, for example, tend to develop energetic personalities; those in easy ones, less energetic ones. Moreover, Stein adds, as well as material influence, there is the possibility of nature exerting a spiritual influence upon the person who grows up in it: the gloomy 'character' of one landscape may produce one type of person; the graceful character of another, a different type (IS 128–30).

Since the nature of the land influences the character of its inhabitants, there is a connection between the unity of the land and the unity of a people. From a given topographical region, there can emerge a unified community of people that can be called a 'race (*Rasse*)'. If the race becomes culturally creative, then 'a people has arisen upon the soil of the land'. A genuine culture requires a population of a certain size (a 'critical mass'). If the inhabitants of a particular geographical unity are too small a unit, they constitute a 'tribe (*Stamm*)'. In this case, 'the unity of a people is not produced until several tribes produce it in that they blend into each other' (IS 130–2). Stein mentions the nineteenth-century 'geographical determinist' Karl Ritter as a source of these views (IS 131), but her views on tribe, race, and people are almost identical with, and possibly inspired by, Spengler's (see GTC II 113 n. 13, 118).¹⁹

The justification of the state

What is the justification of the state? Can the theory that anarchy is a better state of affairs be refuted? Stein rejects three traditional justifications of the state: utility, morality, and historical progress.

People, it is said, 'get along better' with rather than without the state: they procure the necessities of life more effectively if they are organised into a state. Stein rejects this utilitarian justification. Some people—the inhabitants of medieval villages for instance—get along just fine without a state (IS 148–9).

Another view (the 'West Coast Straussians' come to mind [GTC II 194–7]) think of the state as the enforcer of the moral law, the agent of moral community. They think that the state and its 'positive' law should match the 'pure law' determined by an objective hierarchy of values. Stein has enough residual liberalism to reject this justification too: the state is not charged with enforcing the observance of the moral law by its citizens. Morality is a matter for individuals not the state. The state should cooperate with individuals' moral efforts, to be sure, but that is the limit of its concern with morality (IS 100, 155–6, 172).

For Fichte and Hegel, the justification of the state is that it is the agent of historical progress, spiritual development, the agent that realises 'the ultimate purpose of history'. Stein does not explicitly reject the idea of an ultimate purpose, but does reject the idea of the state as its agent. The agents of historical development are cultures not states: the rise and fall of states is at best a sign

of a new epoch in cultural life; the state is at best a bearer of cultural life (IS 178–84). This thesis, the priority of cultural over political history, is once again identical with one of Spengler's central claims (GTC II 105).

What then *is* the justification of the state? The thrust of Stein's entire book is that the sole ground on which value can be attributed to the state is that it is the expression and preserver—the 'self-confidence' (pp. 101–4 above)—of ethnic community. And this indeed is something she asserts:

The state is the bearer of value ... only if "state" is understood to mean not the formal fabric but the concrete pattern of the state that encompasses the ethnic community too. Just as each individual person is a carrier of an irreplaceable value proper to himself alone, so too is each "state personality".

(IS 153)

As a rider to this answer, however, she says that while this gives *a* value to the nation state, it is not an absolute value. The injunction never to break promises is, she claims, an absolute moral law. If the survival of the state depends on treaty breaking, then it would be wrong for it to do so (IS 153–4). The moral law trumps *Realpolitik*.²⁰ So the justification of the state is a provisional one: if it is an ethnic state, and if its existence contravenes no moral law, then the state is a valuable entity. If, on the other hand, it does contravene a moral law, then its negative moral value outweighs the value of it being the vehicle of a people.

Section V: After the conversion

To recapitulate, Stein converted to Catholicism in 1921, was baptised and took her first communion in 1922, and in 1933 entered the Carmelite convent in Cologne as Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Encouraged by her order, she continued to write, the major work of her post-conversion period being the 400 pages of *Finite and Eternal Being*, which was completed in 1937, but on account of the Nazi prohibition on Jewish publications not published until 1950.

Stein's conversion produced, of course, a profound change in her philosophy: in her own terminology, *Finite and Eternal Being* and other works of the same period constitute a turning from a philosophy based exclusively on 'natural reason', philosophy as 'science (*Wissenschaft*)', to 'Christian philosophy'. By 'Christian philosophy' she means 'the reborn philosophy of the Middle Ages', the 'reborn' philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, reborn Thomism (FEB 7). This, however, she claims, is not a rejection of phenomenology, in particular, not a rejection of Husserl, but rather the attempt to discover a 'meeting ground', a 'synthesis' (FEB xxviii) between phenomenology and Thomism. The idea, then, that there is a radical discontinuity between her earlier and later thought is one she would reject. Rather, we shall see, she takes her later thought to be a 'completion' or 'perfection' of what preceded it. I will suggest, however, that, in reality, there is a radical discontinuity.

Christian philosophy

Stein's transformation into a Christian philosopher was not just a personal event: with a line of reasoning closely modelled on Scheler's (GTC II 145–8), she attempts to show that to complete its 'task' (FEB 20 et passim), philosophy as such must become Christian philosophy: at its highest point, philosophy as such must transcend 'science', reason must give way to revelation.

Philosophy, she says, is fundamentally concerned with the 'meaning of being (*Sinn des Seins*)'. Its task is to acquire knowledge of 'being (*das Seiende*)' (FEB 17): of 'essential being (*wesenhaftes Seiende*)' (FEB 141 et passim), of the 'first being (*erstes Seiende*)' (FEB 22), of 'ultimate causes' (FEB 21). It seeks to gain knowledge of 'being as such (*das Seiende als solches*)' together with its essential divisions according to genera and species' (FEB 20). The essence of philosophy is, therefore, 'ontology', that is to say, 'metaphysics'. As Aristotle says, metaphysics is the 'first philosophy' (FEB 14). Modern philosophy's turn to epistemology—she is surely referring to the Kantian limitation on our capacity to know ultimate reality—is thus a deviation from philosophy's true task (FEB 4–5). One of the virtues of phenomenology, therefore (in particular, she holds, of Heidegger's phenomenology), is that it at least attempts to return to 'the question of being'. The fact of revealed truth, however, shows that when it comes to the question of ultimate reality, philosophy comes up short: for it shows that 'there are beings which are beyond the reach of natural experience and natural reason but which have been made known to us by revelation' (FEB 21). This is why Thomas calls Christian philosophy the 'perfection of the work of reason' (FEB 20). It follows then that 'pure philosophy as a science of ... ultimate reasons and causes (and staying within the confines of natural reason) remains, even in its greatest conceivable perfection, something essentially incomplete (*Unvollendetes*)'. If it wishes to complete its task, therefore, it must become 'open to theology through which it can be supplemented' (FEB 26).

Another way of putting this is to say that philosophy can complete itself only by becoming Christian philosophy. 'Christian philosophy' appears, then, to be defined by two conditions. First, it is philosophy that accepts that 'revealed truth' as 'told by the magisterial authority of the Church' is the 'standard of measurement to which philosophers have to subordinate their own judgment'. To be a Christian philosopher, one must be prepared to 'sacrifice philosophical insight on being told ... that one's supposed discovery is incompatible with Christian doctrine'. (One sees, here, what Tillich means when he objects to Catholic 'authoritarianism' [ST II 291].) Second, a Christian philosopher must accept that, in the end, reason must give way to mysticism since 'what is revealed to us by revelation cannot be comprehended at all ... by means of concepts' (FEB 22). That these two conditions are not obviously consistent with each other is a matter to which I shall return.

Given that ultimate and absolute truth is delivered by revelation, one might raise the question of why reason, philosophy as 'science', is necessary at all.

Aquinas, says Stein, provided the Christian answer when he said that, in discussions with ‘pagans and Moslems’ where there is no common faith on which to ground one’s assertions, it becomes necessary ‘to have recourse to that natural reason to which all must assent’ (FEB 13). And so natural reason (Aquinas’ ‘five ways’, for instance) can be useful in opening the mind of the rational unbeliever to revealed truth. Earthly wisdom can, says Stein, provide ‘glimpses’ of ‘the plenitude of divine wisdom which will permit us to envision with one single glance what human reason has been trying to complete during millennia of its laborious efforts’ (FEB 21).

This, then, is Stein’s ‘meeting point’ between ‘scientific’ philosophy and Thomism. It is, however, hardly the advertised ‘synthesis’, since a synthesis is something that occurs between factors that are roughly equal. Rather, it is the reduction of philosophy to a servant, to the ‘handmaid of theology (*ancilla theologiae*)’ that it was in the Middle Ages, a reduction made explicit in Scheler’s account of Christian philosophy (GTC II 147).

Stein’s Heidegger critique

A concrete example of Stein’s conception of how Christian thought helps ‘complete’ secular philosophy is provided by her Heidegger critique, a critique mainly focused on *Being and Time* but also containing brief discussions of two of his works from 1929, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* and *The Essence of Reasons*.

Like every other phenomenologist of her generation, Stein was enormously impressed by her virtual contemporary Martin Heidegger, whom Arendt described as the ‘hidden king’ of German philosophy (GTC I 104). For Stein, the significance of *Being and Time* is that it provides ‘glimpses’ of ultimate truth, glimpses, however, that Heidegger, animated by positive hostility—‘spitefulness’ (MH 82)—towards Christianity refuses to develop. As her fellow Christian phenomenologist (and godmother) Hedwig Conrad-Martius puts it, ‘it is as if a door which had remained locked for ages ... had suddenly blown open with tremendous force and then immediately slammed shut again’ (FEB 61 n. 51). Stein sees her own Heidegger critique as an attempt to ‘complete’ his philosophy by reopening that door and revealing what is on the other side. She has five principal criticisms of Heidegger.

Stein’s first criticism. *Being and Time*’s avowed purpose is to answer the question of the ‘meaning of being (*Sinn des Seins*)’.²¹ Heidegger takes himself to answer that question by answering a different one: What is the human being’s (‘*Dasein*’s’) understanding of being? By doing this, he makes the human being ‘a little god’ since he claims for the human being something which ‘according to *philosophia perennis* is reserved for God’. Heidegger’s obtuseness with respect to his fundamental question is further revealed by the fact that ‘God is spoken of only now and then in footnotes, and then only in a dismissive fashion’ (MH 69).

Like Heidegger himself, Stein is unacquainted with Frege's clarifying distinction between 'sense (*Sinn*)' and 'reference (*Bedeutung*)'. But, in fact, it is reasonably clear that by *Sinn* she actually means *Bedeutung*: the 'question of being' is, for her, a question not about what we mean by the word 'being', but about that to which it refers: it is the question of what fundamentally exists. Heidegger, however, so she claims, equates fundamental ontology with Dasein's understanding of what fundamentally exists. But by doing this, he attributed to us unmediated and therefore veridical access to the ultimately real—'intellectual intuition' as Kant called it—whereas, as Kant himself says, such access belongs only to God. Only, that is, by turning to the truths of revelation can fundamental ontology be completed.

Although Heidegger is not particularly transparent on this point, I think that what Stein misses is the post-Kantian character of *Being and Time*. Heidegger's account of what he indeed calls 'fundamental ontology' (GTC I 117–19) is an account of our understanding of fundamental ontology, not because he thinks we have unmediated access to the real but because an account of the Fregean 'sense' of 'being' is *all that philosophy can achieve*. It is precisely because, as Kant showed, all our access to the real is mediated by the particular structure of the human mind—by, as Heidegger would prefer to put it, the human mode of being-in-the-world—precisely because we do *not* have intellectual intuition, that fundamental ontology in any further sense is impossible. Whatever lies beyond our understanding of being is, phenomenologically speaking, 'nothing', nothing to us.

Stein's second criticism. In *Being and Time*, she correctly reports, Dasein is said to be 'thrown'. That is, it 'discovers itself in existence without knowing how it came to be there, [only] that it is not from and through itself'. But while one might try to silence it or declare it meaningless, the question of our origin

always inevitably arises again ... and requires a something which is founding without being founded, something which founds itself: One that throws the "thrown". Thus thrownness reveals itself as creatureliness [i.e., createdness].

(MH 70–1)

Heidegger describes our existence as 'thrown': but thrownness demands a thrower: therefore, if we are thrown, God exists. In noting our essential thrownness, Heidegger 'blows open the door' to the divine but by declaring only 'the nothing' to lie beyond being-in-the-world, irrationally slams it shut again.

This is a very odd objection given, as Stein knows, that 'thrownness' in *Being and Time* describes not merely the fact that we do not come into existence by our own choice but also the fundamental mood of 'abandonment' (GTC I 129–30). Since she obviously does not want to attribute abandonment to her benevolent God, she highlights the cognitive meaning of 'thrownness' and downplays its affective meaning. The main problem with the criticism, however, is that for all her claims to be a phenomenologist focusing on the

phenomena, she misses the point that one's *sense* of there being an unknown thrower does not imply that there *is* such a thrower any more than the sense of living a charmed life implies the existence of a divine charmer. Many moods are 'as-if' states of mind: to experience oneself as thrown into existence is to experience oneself *as if* there in virtue of the action of a thrower.

Stein's third criticism. Heidegger, she observes, describes Dasein's 'deterioration', its lapse from authentic into inauthentic being, as a 'fall' (GTC I 141–2). But a fall from where or what? While Heidegger provides no answer, 'the teaching of the Church concerning the Fall is the solution to the puzzle'. To complete Heidegger's notion of falling, one requires the notion of God-given 'essence' (MH 73–4). Once again, the perfection of secular philosophy requires the resources of Christianity.

This is a poor objection since it ignores Heidegger's (as well as Husserl's) social constructivist account of the self, according to which, as we arrive in adulthood, we find ourselves 'already in' an ethical 'heritage', a heritage that provides an account of our ideal self (GTC I 149–52). (Stein belongs to the phalanx of Heidegger's Jewish critics who pretend that Division II Section V of *Being and Time*, the section in which he discusses heritage, does not exist [p. 173 below].) The self with respect to which inauthentic Dasein 'falls' short is a social construction.

Stein's fourth criticism. According to Heidegger, notes Stein, death is 'the end of Dasein'. And since he clearly identifies 'Dasein' with 'human being', his claim is that what follows death is 'non-being' (MH 76). But 'death is the end' is poor phenomenology because faced with the 'dark gate' of death, we inevitably ask 'And what then?' Phenomenologically speaking, death is a transition, not an end. Moreover, the calmness of the faces of people who have died is enough to suggest that there is life after death even to someone who has never heard of the afterlife. The reason Heidegger cannot give a proper phenomenology of death is that he has rejected from the beginning the traditional account of the human being as a substance composed of body and soul in favour of his behavioural notion of being-in-the-world. To complete his account of death, he needs to 'open the door' and reintroduce the soul as conceived in Christian theology (MH 74–8).

The first point to make is that Heidegger is correct: since 'Dasein' is *defined* as 'being-in-the-world' (GTC I 122), the end of the latter *is* the end of the former. Stein's claim that we do not experience death as *our* end (a claim that is becoming increasingly false) is irrelevant: even if we experience death as transition, it is still the end of our *worldly* being. Stein claims that 'it cannot be doubted that Heidegger wants to understand *Dasein as the human kind of being*' (MH 69). For Heidegger, she thinks, 'Dasein' and 'human being' are synonyms, so if he claims that death is the end of Dasein, he also claims that it is the end of the human being, the end of 'us'. But this is clearly a mistake. Heidegger goes out of his way to say that while 'Dasein' ('*existenz*', being-in-the-world) is a kind

of being we, for a time, *have* (BT 25), whether or not we also have some other kind of being that survives death is left 'entirely undecided' (BT 247–8): that he is talking about being-in-the-world *rather than human being* is why he denies that *Being and Time* contains an 'anthropology' (BT 45). Once again, the post-Kantian nature of his inquiry reveals itself: nowhere does he assert that 'non-being' is what faces *us* after death; he is simply agnostic on the subject.

Stein's fifth criticism. The 'moment of vision' (GTC I 148) plays an important role in *Being and Time*: modelled on Jaspers' 'limit situation' (pp. 37–40 above), it is the moment in which one sees what must be done by rising above the petty urgencies of daily life and grasps one's proper life as a totality. Since the totality that one grasps is a temporal totality, the self that does the grasping must, Stein infers, stand outside time: 'there must be a breaking open of temporality'. This, she concludes, 'proves that our being is not simply temporal, that it does not exhaust itself in temporality'. Heidegger himself calls the moment of vision an 'image of [from] eternity', which shows that he needs to supplement his account of temporality with a recognition of atemporal, 'eternal' being (MH 79).

This is the same fallacious inference taken over from Scheler from the necessity of a transcendental 'I' to that of a transcendent 'I' (pp. 80–1 above). And it is strangely oblivious to a well-known experience. The moment in which one 'grasps one's life as a totality' is not particularly uncommon: the moment before the car crashes in which 'one's whole life flashes before one's eyes' is an experience in which one 'stands outside' the temporal totality of one's life. The same notion is employed by the folk advice to 'write one's obituary and then live up to it' if one wishes to live a worthwhile life. But, of course, one does not need to have a literally atemporal self to do this: it is a feat of imagination devoid of ontological presuppositions.

* * *

As I have indicated, the theme running through all of Stein's criticisms of *Being and Time* is derived from her conception of Christian (or perhaps better, Christianised) philosophy: to complete the work's task of identifying the nature of being and of human being, Heidegger must open wide the door he has already half-opened instead of slamming it shut. And if he does that, she claims, he will see that Christian thought alone can complete his appointed task.

Postponing for a moment the claim that *Being and Time* needs a supplement, I should like to first attend to the character of the supplement Stein proposes. It is, in Heidegger's word, 'ontotheology' (GTC I 242), a theology that reduces both God and the self to beings. Recall that Stein quite explicitly claims the target of philosophy to be a *Seiende*, the 'ultimate', 'essential' 'first' being, the first 'cause' (p. 107 above). And recall that Heidegger's alleged failure to give a proper account of death is his refusal to understand the human being in terms of the traditional body–soul duality, the duality of two *Seiende* (of the ghost and the

machine). Heidegger begins *Being and Time* by calling for the ‘destruction’ of ontotheology (GTC I 120); Stein simply wishes to re-establish it.

But Heidegger has powerful, and in fact religious, objections to ontotheology. To treat God as a being is to reduce him to the ‘God of the philosophers’—a God that had infected a great deal of theology—a God who is the solution to the intellectual problem of the origin of the universe. The reduction of God to an efficient cause, however, deprives him of his ‘mystery’ and therefore of his holiness. A God before whom we can ‘bow down in awe’ (GTC I 242) is essentially mysterious, beyond the reach of concepts such as ‘being’ and ‘cause’. (This is Tillich’s objection to the ‘cosmological’ God [p. 121 below], an objection almost certainly inspired by Heidegger.)

Notice, here, the contradiction, to which I alluded earlier, in Stein’s definition of ‘Christian philosophy’ (p. 107 above). On the one hand, she says that to approach the ultimately real, ‘scientific’ philosophy must give way to mysticism, while, on the other, she says that the ultimate standard of truth is the ‘magisterial authority’ of Church ‘doctrine’ (p. 102 above), in which she includes her own ontotheological version of Thomism. And so God both is, and is not, beyond concepts. It is likely that she eventually saw the contradiction, for in final works such as *The Science of the Cross*, she abandons philosophy completely in favour of mystical meditation on Christian symbols.

Stein’s reading of Heidegger stops with the works of 1929. And so she misses the radical ‘turning’ in Heidegger’s thought, which he identifies as beginning with ‘The Essence of Truth’ of 1930 (GTC I 232). The essence of the turning is the thought that our world understanding is ‘not an achievement of subjectivity’. Rather, it is something we *receive*, something ‘gifted to us’ by—we can only say—‘the mystery’ and for which ‘thanks’ are due (p. 55 above). Since the mystery is also a ‘holy’ mystery, the post-turning Heidegger does in fact ‘open the door’ to the ‘divine radiance’ (GTC I 243–4) and so turns in the direction Stein thinks he should turn (though he speaks not of a ‘supplement’ to but rather a ‘reversal’ against his earlier thought). As with Scheler, however (GTC II 154–62), it is a turning, not to the God of Thomist ontotheology but to a divinity that, whatever else it might be, is not a being.

Heidegger called ‘Christian philosophy’ ‘wooden iron’, a self-contradiction (IM 7). Given that it requires the sacrifice of ‘philosophical insight’ to the ‘magisterial authority’ of the Church reduces philosophy to the propaganda arm of the Catholic Church, it is hard not to agree. With Stein’s conversion to Catholicism, the world acquired an admirable person, a saint, and martyr. But it lost, one might well think, a philosopher.

Section VI: On women

As a woman who had attempted but failed to make a career in a man’s world, Stein had a natural interest in relations between the sexes. She also had a keen

interest in the feminist movement, which had been a presence in German life ever since the attempted revolution of 1848 and had obtained satisfaction of some of its demands in 1919, in the constitution of the Weimar Republic. Her essays on the nature of women and their proper role in society are contained in *Die Frau: Fragestellungen und Reflexionen* (*The Woman: Questions and Reflections*), translated into English as *Essays on Women* (EW).

The essays in this collection were written between 1928 and 1933, in other words, well after the conversion: their author is no longer Edith Stein but rather Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. And so she insists that while Jesus is the ideal role model for all human beings, 'every woman who wants to fulfil her destiny must look to Mary as ideal' (EW 119). In fact, however, Catholicism is not an essential determinant of her views on women: the foundation of those views is her conception of the 'soul' that was worked out nearly a decade prior to her conversion.

The souls of men and women

Stein's conversion, her willingness to sacrifice philosophical insight to Christian doctrine, required her to change her conception of the soul. Since God gives the soul eternal life (FEB 504), since the soul survives biological death as a being 'in and for itself' (MH 78, FEB 479), it is no longer true that a soul is 'always necessarily a soul in a body' (p. 80 above). Yet in all other respects, the soul remains the same biological entity that it was in the earlier, secular conception. For, together with Aristotle and Aquinas, Stein continues to assert the principle that *anima forma corporis* (the soul is the form of the body) (EW 44), continues to take the soul to be a biological entity that accounts for the development of an organism into the organism it is. How a soul can both be a biological entity and immortal is unclear.²² Perhaps one could think of it, or at least its 'innermost centre' (FEB 504), as something like a genetic code, temporarily implanted in an organism and then, post mortem, re-realised in some other, non-biological entity. But in any case, when it comes to the discussion of men and women, the issue of immortality is irrelevant, since it plays no role in distinguishing between their souls.

The Aristotelian soul, we know from the pre-conversion works, is a part of nature, woven into the order of natural causation. But now, of course, since God created nature, the 'order of nature' is also 'the order of grace' (EW 95), the 'voice' of nature one and the same as the 'voice' of God (EW 76). What is natural is also what God ordains. (Herein, of course, lies the difficulty religious people have with 'unnatural' practices such as abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality, practices which, in Stein's phrase, violate both the 'order of nature' and that of 'grace' [see p. 130 below].) That men and women are fundamentally different is what is decreed, says Stein, by the 'voice' of both God and nature: since male and female bodies and bodily functions are different,

so must be male and female souls, male and female ‘psychological (*seelische*)’ attributes.

Fairly predictably, the main difference—a difference that ‘emerges from nature’—is that men are more ‘objective’, while women are more ‘personal’ (EW 255). Men can detach themselves from their embodied situation (EW 95) to grasp abstract, universal principles whether of mathematics or business management, and can follow them in a disciplined (‘Prussian’, one might be tempted to add) manner. The weakness of this capacity is that men can be ‘one-sided’, inflexible followers of the letter of the law, and therefore unjust. Women, on the other hand, designed by God and nature to nurture and protect a living being, respond to the concrete and individual reality of a whole person. And they respond *with* their whole person, with heart as well as head. This disposes them to act more justly than men. And so the ‘feminine singularity’ (Goethe’s *Ewig-Weibliche*) has the potential to complement the masculine singularity. Women, on the other hand, can be overemotional, can lapse into ‘hysteria’. And however nurturing their intentions might be, they are liable to be ineffective unless complemented by male clarity and discipline. A dose of male ‘objectivity’ is a necessary ‘antidote to the *hyper-feminine nature*’ (EW 254–8, 244). There is, then, a divine harmony created through the difference between the male and female souls.

Women and the professions

Stein’s view of the essential difference between the male and female soul puts her at odds with the early manifestation of the feminist movement. For them, she observes, the watchword was ‘emancipation’: they wished to have access to all the professions traditionally reserved for men. In the heat of battle, they denied feminine singularity: denied that women were in any significant way different from men. They demanded, as it were, to succeed as men in a man’s world. The recognition of (some of) their demands by the Weimar Constitution, however, has cooled the heat of battle, and with clearer heads, claims Stein, we now accept feminine singularity as ‘self-evident’ (EW 253–4).

What, however, are the social implications of female singularity? If ‘woman’s nature is determined by her original vocation of *spouse and mother*’ (EW 132), does it follow that she should be restricted to her traditional role, to *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, church)? Does a professional life outside the home, asks Stein, ‘violate the order of nature and of grace’ (EW 95)? Not so, she replies. Prior to the industrial revolution, the domestic sphere absorbed all of a woman’s creative energies. (Stein seems to have in mind an upper middle-class household with many servants, so that managing a household was like managing a small business venture.) But with the revolution (with servants disappearing into the factories and machines taking their place), this was no longer the case. The convent might have been an alternative, Stein adds on an

autobiographical note, but with secularisation, this was, for most, no longer an option (EW 105). And so women began to demand entry into the professions. And in this, the early feminists were entirely justified: 'A common creativity [between men and women] in all areas was assigned in the original order, even if this was with a different allocation of roles' (EW 95).

This, however, does not mean that all of the professions are likely to be equally satisfying for women. The maternal soul is naturally drawn to the caring professions such as nursing and teaching (both of which Stein herself practiced). The latter is a particularly valuable vocation, since it is primarily in the schools that the moral character of the nation is formed, a function which places the humanities rather than technical training at the heart of the curriculum. Since the central task of teachers is the formation of moral character, they must themselves be educated, initiated into the (Scheler's) 'objective hierarchy of values' that places 'supernatural values above all earthly values'. Only thus can they impart moral knowledge to their pupils (EW 105).

That some professions are more 'natural' for women does not mean that they must avoid the traditionally masculine professions. Women are likely, for instance, to make particularly good doctors. Whereas men are liable to abstract from the person and view the patient as a defective mechanism, women can understand that disease is often a condition of the whole person and can respond to the whole person. The important point is that, contrary to the early suffragettes, if a woman enters a traditionally masculine profession, she should not seek to act just as men do, should not allow herself to be forced into 'practices alien to her nature', but should aim to 'convert the masculine profession into a feminine one' (EW 254). This involves playing to her strengths. If, for example, she enters politics, while men are inclined to enact legislation 'without consideration of the actual circumstances and consequences in practical life', 'feminine singularity' resists such abstraction: 'woman is suited to act in accordance with the concrete human circumstance and so she is able to serve as redress here' (EW 263). Not only in politics but also within bureaucracies, female singularity can play a valuable role in modifying inflexible male adherence to the letter of the law (EW 264).

With respect to only two professions does Stein discriminate against women. Though women can play important leadership roles in the Church, they cannot be priests, partly because none of the disciples were women but mainly because Christ came to earth as the *son* of man (EW 83–4). And in academic life, the realms of austere objectivity—pure mathematics, physics, and, Stein adds, 'pure philosophy'—is unsuited to women (EW 263). Translating, editing, in general 'mothering', is, she says, the appropriate role in these disciplines (EW 49)—giving in, rather disappointingly, to the role to which she was reduced by Husserl. Should a woman engage in her own research, 'feminine singularity will only be fruitful in the humanities' (EW 263). What follows from this is that Stein now regards her own oeuvre as belonging to the humanities and, *as such*,

falling short of 'pure philosophy'. This is an allusion, presumably, to Husserl's claim that philosophy must be a 'rigorous science' (GTC I 104–5) and a designation of her own phenomenological studies as falling short of, or being other than, 'pure philosophy'.

Notes

- 1 The translator of this work, Waltraut Stein, is Edith Stein's great niece.
- 2 Stein does not define 'worldview', but since the entire discussion of understanding the radically other is an engagement with Dilthey, it may be assumed that she understands the term in Dilthey's manner (pp. 7–14 above).
- 3 Dilthey, of course, denies that 'empathy' has any role in historical interpretation. As we have seen, however, he understands empathy in Lipps' manner as 'becoming one' with the other (pp. 75–6). *In Stein's sense*, according to which 'empathy' just means 'non-inferential knowledge of the inner life of others', he would of course accept that historical understanding is a matter of empathy.
- 4 It might be objected that all that is required to know my body as a body is the conception of other possible perspectives on it. Stein can reasonably reply, however, that it is hard to imagine how someone could arrive at the idea of other possible perceivers without first arriving at the idea of other actual perceivers.
- 5 MacIntyre (2006) 86.
- 6 Schopenhauer (1966) I 230–1.
- 7 A more accurate translation would be '*Contributions to the Foundations of Psychology and the Humanities*'.
- 8 This 'pure ego' seems to be the same as the transcendent 'spiritual subject' of the empathy book (p. 80). The description of it is formally contradictory: if it is 'transcendent', it cannot be entirely 'quality-less'. Stein must mean to claim that it is 'devoid of natural qualities'.
- 9 That the translator mostly translates *bedingen* as 'determine' rather than 'condition' is a bad mistake.
- 10 Hildebrand (1916).
- 11 If Stein reads Scheler correctly, as I believe she does, then I misrepresented Scheler at GTC II 243 in claiming him to regard all genuine communities as 'collective persons'.
- 12 Notice Stein's frequent use of *Volksgemeinschaft*. Discussions of Heidegger's involvement with the Nazis sometimes suggest this term to be a Nazi concoction, but that, clearly, is false.
- 13 This use of 'soul' corresponds neither to Stein's earlier conception nor, we shall see, to her post-conversion conception. It is basically the same as Spengler's conception in which the 'soul' of a culture is its unique character (p. 126), and is really just another name for what the empathy book calls 'spirit'. As we shall see, there are other ideas shared by both Stein and Spengler. It is unclear whether they were simply in the air or whether Stein had actually read Spengler's book, which would have sold something approaching a million copies by the time she came to formulate her social and political philosophy.
- 14 This remark does not commit Stein to the Nazi view that there is a 'German physics' that is somehow different from 'Jewish physics': *Wissenschaft* ('science') covers the humanities and the natural sciences and there is at least some plausibility in the idea that there is an English tradition in, say, literary criticism or historical studies that is different from the German tradition. Nonetheless, this remark sits uncomfortably with the claim that scientific discoveries belong to the entire 'scientific community' (p. 93).
- 15 On this use of 'soul', see note 12 above.
- 16 *Nicomachean Ethics* Bk VIII 1155a.
- 17 At IS 133, Stein talks about the blending of tribes in prehistory, but nowhere does she connect the idea of 'blending' with the possibility of *becoming*, for instance, German.
- 18 Notice how similar this dialectic of assertion and (far-fetched) counterexample is to the manner in which analytic philosophers typically proceed. Much of the time, there is little *methodological*

difference between phenomenology and analytic philosophy, a fact recognised by J. L. Austin who sometimes referred to his procedure as 'linguistic phenomenology'.

- 19 The idea of ethnic community as a product of the land is the basis of another objection to the non-ethnic state. If state boundaries cut across ethnic boundaries, says Stein, the result is an 'irredenta', a resentful group cut off from their ethnic fellows, which constitutes a danger to the state in which it is contained (IS 132). One thinks of the ethnic Germans in the Sudetenland who provided the excuse for Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia.
- 20 Note that there is no inconsistency between Stein's requirement that the leaders of the state observe the moral law and her earlier claim that it is not their business to enforce it within the state. The principle that morality is a matter for individuals is preserved.
- 21 An extended account of *Being and Time* is to be found in GTC I chap. 6.
- 22 Unclear, I think, to Stein herself. Although *Finite and Eternal Being* almost always says that the soul separates, is 'wrenched away' (MH 78), from the body at death, at one point, tucked away in a footnote, she posits the idea that soul and body never separate: 'The separation of body and soul in death is the cutting through (*Durchschneidung*) of a natural unity and does not destroy the intimate connection between the two, although both suffer a certain diminution of their nature' (FEB 597 n. 27). I leave making sense of this as a task for the reader.

4 Paul Tillich

Religious existentialism

Paul Tillich was born in 1886 in Starzeddel (now Starosiedle in Poland) in the Prussian province of Brandenburg. His father was a Lutheran pastor whose authoritarian moral conservatism produced in him a lifelong aversion to authoritarian ‘moralism’. Karl Barth accused the mature Tillich of continuing to struggle against Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor, and Tillich conceded that Barth was correct (ET 256).¹ He attended high school in Königsberg (Kant’s city) and Berlin, and university in Berlin, Tübingen, Halle and Breslau, receiving his doctorate in philosophy from Breslau in 1910 and his licentiate in theology from Halle in 1912. His PhD thesis was on Schelling, whose account of nature as an organic whole grounded in a primordial ‘will’ stayed with him, we shall see, throughout his life. In 1912, he was ordained a Lutheran minister, and two years later, he married the interestingly unconventional yet unfortunately incompatible Margarethe Wever. As a member of a Christian fraternity during his student days, Tillich had taken a vow of chastity, which he did not break until the marriage. It seems likely that the need to break his sexual fast propelled him into this unfortunate marriage.

The First World War marked the end of, as Stefan Zweig called it, ‘the world of yesterday’. It marked the end of the world in which Tillich felt at home: 1914, he writes, was the real end of the nineteenth century, an age of ‘stability, liberalism, and ... unbroken cultural continuity’ (ET 250). The war was ‘the end of the world order’ (PT 51). He volunteered as chaplain to a German artillery division and spent four years on the battlefield, taking part in the horrendous battles of both Verdun and the Marne. He was awarded the Iron Cross First Class, but, towards the end of the war, suffered a nervous breakdown: ‘body and soul are broken’, he wrote home, ‘and can never be entirely repaired’. He also lost his faith in the traditional God: no God who was both all-powerful and wholly good could have allowed the war to have happened (P 53–4). Reflecting on the war later on, he said that for him and his generation, it was a kind of ‘death’ (PT 153).

Released from the army, Tillich returned to Berlin to take up an untenured lecturing position at the university where he taught the philosophy of religion. Revolution, in these early days of the Weimar Republic, was in the air. Tillich

supported the socialists, though not the communists, and, in 1919, helped found a circle of religious socialists (p. 132 below), which is where he met and, in spite of their doctrinal differences, became friends with Martin Buber. As the violence between communist and proto-fascist street gangs subsided, Berlin developed into the centre of avant garde European culture: the place of Bauhaus design, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, Marlene Dietrich's *The Blue Angel*, Berthold Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, the art of George Grosz, Max Beckmann, Wassily Kandinsky, and Otto Dix, of drugs, cabaret, and every conceivable variety of sex. While Tillich was away at the front, it turned out, his wife had had an affair with his friend Richard Wegener (another Lutheran minister), to whom she bore two children. In 1919, she left Tillich for Wegener. Since Tillich and Wegener remained good friends, Margarethe's defection, and the divorce in 1921, likely came as a relief to Tillich. Freed of the millstone, he was now able to plunge into a life he euphemistically referred to as 'the *Bohème*' (PT 81). He absorbed the nature poetry of Goethe, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Rilke, wrote—like Sartre—in cafés, developed a passion for Cézanne and for the blue horses of Franz Marc. In flight from the moralism of his father, he had many erotic adventures.

In 1920, he met Hannah Werner, an art teacher who wore green stockings. Their marriage in 1924 required her to leave her previous husband and child. Both Hannah and Paul rejected monogamy and conducted an open marriage much in the style of Sartre and de Beauvoir. The marriage was, however, never peaceful. As she records in her riveting memoir *From Time to Time*,² Hannah suffered from jealousy and Paul from guilt. Like Sartre and Strindberg, Tillich concluded that love was tragic and marriage sad (PT 92).

In 1924, Tillich began three semesters of teaching at Marburg, standing in for the ailing Rudolf Otto whose famous *The Idea of the Holy* influenced him deeply (as it did Heidegger): through Otto's influence, he says, he approached the idea of God via that of the holy rather than the reverse (ET 253). Although he seems to have had no personal contact with Heidegger, who was then at Marburg teaching the material that became *Being and Time*, and very little with Rudolf Bultmann, Heidegger's theological interlocutor, the content of Heidegger's work filtered back via graduate students and became the framework of much of his own thinking. From 1925 to 1929, Tillich was an untenured professor of philosophy and religious studies at the Dresden Institute of Technology, which was trying to build up a school of humanities. His 'demythologizing' brand of theology prompted a baroness who was sitting in on his classes to tell him that she was 'always enchanted' by his lectures, but hoped that 'someday you will come to God' (P 102).

In 1929, he was finally offered a tenured position, the professorship at the University of Frankfurt that would have been Max Scheler's had he not died before being able to take it up (GTC II 128–9). This was the most intellectually exciting time of Tillich's life. The university was staffed largely by left-wing

Jews, which led the Nazis to call it 'the red university'. He became friends with the critical theorists, with Horkheimer whom he sponsored to become director of the Institute for Social Research (GTC I chap. 2), and with Adorno, whose doctoral thesis on Kierkegaard's aesthetics he both supervised and graded, supposedly commenting, 'I can't understand a word, but it's wonderful' (PT 116).

And then, everything stopped. With the Nazi accession to power in 1933, Tillich's *The Socialist Decision* was burned, and, though he was not himself Jewish, his position was terminated together with those of all the Jewish faculty.

Tillich had no option but to leave Germany, an expulsion he described as a 'second death' (PT 153): 'estrangement' and 'homelessness', we shall see, are central to his account of the modern condition. Largely through the effort of the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, he was able to emigrate to America and take up a position in the Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he remained until 1955. Having abandoned church attendance in 1919, at Niebuhr's prompting he took it up again. Once he had learnt English—he always spoke with a heavy accent and had a disposition to unintentional neologisms such as 'crucifixion' for 'crucifixion' and 'salvated' for 'saved'—he was able to give lectures in philosophy at nearby Columbia alongside his duties at the seminary. He would have preferred a permanent position at Columbia, being always more drawn to philosophy than theology (PT 161), but, dominated as it was by pragmatism and analytic philosophy, the philosophy department had little interest in his kind of existentialism. He was, however, elected to Columbia's Philosophy Club, the principal locus of his interaction with American philosophers. A visitor from England, G. E. Moore, claimed not to have understood a single word of the paper 'Existential Philosophy' Tillich read to the Club (PT 185). Almost certainly, he did not try. Tillich observes that

[i]n understanding existential philosophy, a comparison with the situation in England may be helpful. England is the only European country in which the Existential problem of finding a new meaning for life [created by 'the breakdown of religious tradition'] has no significance, because there, positivism and the religious tradition lived on side by side, united by a social conformism which prevented radical questioning about the meaning of human "Existence". (TC 108)³

In 1955, Tillich was appointed to one of the most senior professorships at Harvard where he taught in the Divinity School. With the added prestige of Harvard behind him, he now became a famous public figure able to appeal to many people who had no previous inclination to religion. In 1959, he appeared on the front cover of the March 16th edition of *Time* magazine, chosen because the editor Henry Luce, considered him as the most influential theologian in America. He travelled widely in America and Europe, receiving, he reported, 15–20 speaking invitations a week. In Germany, he received the Peace Prize from the German Publishers' Association. Following a final three years as the

Nuveen Professor of Divinity at the University of Chicago, he died of a heart attack in 1966.

Tillich admits to a ‘certain inconsistency and indefiniteness of terminology’ due to the ‘influence of different and sometimes competitive [sic] motives of thought’ (ET 263–4). It is not difficult to pick holes and contradictions in what he writes. If, however, one takes a generous and creative approach to his writings, what emerges, it seems to me, is an important thinker—albeit a dubiously Christian one.

Section I: Our predicament

The task of theology

Although by inclination a philosopher, professionally Tillich was a Christian theologian whose three-volume magnum opus is entitled *Systematic Theology*. (The volumes appeared in 1951, 1957, and 1963.) What, then, as he sees it, is the task of theology? In the modern age, he says, theology must be ‘apologetic’ rather than ‘kerygmatic’ (ST I 6): it has to be a defence of the Christian faith rather than a mere ‘proclamation’ of its message. If theology becomes nothing but ‘in house’ preaching to the converted, he observes, it will merely hasten the ‘death of God’. Only apologetics can make theology a living force in a secular age.

What does Tillich mean by ‘apologetics’? For Aquinas, it was a matter of providing ‘arguments for the existence of God’—his ‘five ways’—arguments designed to convert a rational person from unbelief to belief. Tillich regards this as wrong-headed. Not only are all such arguments invalid (CTB 181), there are arguments that genuinely prove that no such being as the traditional God could possibly exist (TC 5) (the ‘problem of evil’, of evils such as the First World War, is surely at the front of Tillich’s mind). The real problem, however, with this kind of apologetics is, he claims, that the phrase ‘existence of God’ is ‘an impossible combination of words’ (DF 53–4). It is impossible because it is an implicit contradiction. In the tradition in which God is classified as belonging among the things that ‘exist’ (in Stein’s Catholicism, for instance), he is presented as a ‘being’—the ‘highest being’, to be sure, but, as a being, still subject to the categories of being: cause, substance, ‘person’, ego, self, and so on. But God, in ‘his’ majesty, is supposed to be beyond all such categories: in his divinity, as Rudolf Ott emphasises, he is, by definition, beyond conceptual comprehension. The ‘orthodox’, ‘theistic’ (as Heidegger would say, ‘ontotheological’) conception of God is therefore self-contradictory. And it is also ‘the first step towards atheism’: as science becomes more powerful and epistemically more and more privileged, the idea of a supernatural being intervening in, or at least creating, the natural order becomes more and more unbelievable. If we are to preserve the idea of a living God in the modern age, ‘we are forced to reconsider the meaning of that tremendous word *God*’. Rather than thinking

of God as *a* being, we should rather think of him as ‘being-itself’ (TC 4–9). The central task in section II of this chapter will be to elucidate this idea of God as ‘being-itself’.

Not ‘proofs of the existence of God’, then, but rather ‘answering theology’: an apologetics relevant to the modern age

answers questions implied in the “situation” in [through?] the power of the eternal message and with the means provided by the situation whose questions it answers.
(ST I 6)

Apologetic theology answers these questions via what Tillich calls his ‘method of correlation’, a way of correlating ‘human existence with divine manifestation’ (ST I 8): ‘existential’ questions are to be provided with Christian answers. These questions are not, however, to be found written down on a big list somewhere. Often we are unaware of, or at least repress, the questions posed by our own existence. To uncover the problematic character of human existence in general and modern existence in particular, we need to turn to art, to ‘depth psychology’, and, above all, to (the right kind of) philosophy.

Estrangement

As Hegel saw, says Tillich, the basic character of the human condition is ‘estrangement’, ‘universal, tragic estrangement’. Man is estranged from ‘his essential being’, from ‘what he essentially is and ought to be’ (ST II 51, TC 123). Our estrangement is expressed in Plato’s myth of the fall from our true home on the ‘rim of the heavens’ and in Genesis’s myth of our expulsion from the Garden of Eden (CTB 126). (It is also expressed in Freud’s notion of the ‘death instinct’, the notion that we have an innate desire to return to the anxiety-free state of the womb [pp. 203–5 below], and in Schiller’s notion that we have a ‘sentimental’ desire to return to the ‘naïve’ [pp. 144–5 below].) Estrangement is, as Schelling puts it, the inevitable consequence of the ‘disrupted unity’ that comes with ‘finitude’, with personal, mortal existence (TC 102–3). Here we find the root of the problem of human existence: because we are estranged from the ‘ground’ of everything, we find ourselves ‘strangers’ in the world. At the root of human existence is ‘homelessness’, ‘loneliness’ (CTB 45, 143), and ‘anxiety’. The most important of these terms is ‘anxiety’.

Anxiety

Because of our estrangement, claims Tillich, anxiety is an inescapable part of our existence: it belongs to the ‘ontology’, the ‘existential structure’, that defines the human condition. This is something that Freud knew but which is missed by most ‘depth psychologists’, by psychoanalysts such as Fromm

(chap. 7 below) and Jung who assume that all forms of anxiety are pathological and can, in principle, be healed through, in a broad sense, 'medical' procedures. But this is not so. The 'existential structures' that define the human condition 'cannot be healed by [even] the most refined techniques'. They are, rather, objects of 'salvation' (TC 122–3), of, that is, a different kind of healing: etymologically, observes Tillich, 'salvation means healing' (TC 49). There needs, therefore, to be a kind of collaborative 'counselling' (TC 124) between medicine, theology, and philosophy, counselling informed by 'an ontological analysis of anxiety and ... a sharp distinction between existential and pathological anxiety' (CTB 72).⁴ What, then, is Tillich's 'ontological analysis' of anxiety?

Anxiety, he says, is the 'existential awareness of nonbeing' (CTB 35), of that which 'negates' the positive in human life. It takes three forms: 'ontic anxiety', anxiety caused by the threat posed to one's 'self-affirmation' by fate and death; 'moral anxiety', the 'anxiety of guilt and condemnation'; and the 'anxiety of ... meaninglessness' (CTB 56), anxiety caused by the threat of 'emptiness and loss of meaning'. All three forms belong to 'existence as such' (are, in the language of *Being and Time*, 'existentials'). Each is 'immanent' in the others, although usually, with respect to both individuals and cultures, there is one that predominates (CTB 41–2).

Ontic anxiety, anxiety about 'fate' (illness, poverty, etc.) and death—'nonbeing' in the most literal sense—is omnipresent. Arguments for the 'immortality of the soul' are never 'existentially' convincing, and even in the collectivist cultures of early peoples, the presence of rituals designed as antidotes to death shows that ontic anxiety is still present (CTB 42–3).

Moral anxiety is anxiety about self-rejection and condemnation. One is asked to fulfil one's moral 'destiny', to become what one essentially and potentially is, but anxiety about falling short 'is present in every moment of moral self-awareness'. People try to evade moral anxiety either through 'antinomianism'⁵ ('since God is dead there are no moral norms and hence no guilt') or 'legalism', the definition of the moral life in terms of rigid and absolute laws ('*Never tell a lie*') to which one adheres with fanatical devotion. Moral anxiety and ontic anxiety are each 'immanent' in the other: 'the threat of ... death has always awakened and increased the consciousness of guilt', and consciousness of guilt turns one's mind to death (and judgement) (CTB 51–4). (It might be objected that these claims are inconsistent with 'apologetic' theology, with Tillich's mission to the godless, because they presuppose a Christian worldview whereas for the atheist, there is no connection between death and judgement. I think Tillich would reply that even if one is an atheist, to think of one's death is to think of one's life as a totality and hence to consider how far short one falls from one's ideal of oneself. And conversely, to think of one's guilt is to think about the worth of one's life as it will appear in a final summing up.)

Anxiety about meaning concerns a threat to one's 'spiritual' self-affirmation. Spiritual self-affirmation consists in 'creativity' within the various 'spheres of

meaning' provided by our culture. Creativity does not require that one become a great artist, scientist, or statesman, merely that one makes a personal contribution to the meaningful project in which one is engaged (raising a family, being a lawyer), even if only in a small way. The anxiety in question is anxiety about loss of such an 'ultimate concern' (of which a great deal more later on), loss of 'a meaning which gives meaning to all meanings', loss, that is, of one's 'spiritual centre'. The feared loss happens when a fundamental faith breaks down: one's life as a philosophical logician suddenly shows up as pointless, one religious faith suddenly shows up as absurd, one's cultural tradition comes to present itself as oppressive rather than heroic. A sign that this is occurring is likely to be a retreat to fanaticism: one attacks those who disagree with 'disproportionate violence' because one must suppress disagreement within oneself (CTB 45–51). (What Tillich is talking about, here, is the pathological response to what Jaspers calls a 'limit situation': as Jaspers says, one response to the threatened breakdown of a 'worldview' is to cling to it ever more fanatically [p. 39 above].)

One of the three forms of anxiety is usually dominant, not only in individuals but also in cultural epochs. In the twilight of the ancient world, ontic anxiety was the leading form: stoicism was the prevailing philosophy of life, and stoicism is principally concerned with providing comfort in the face of fate and death. In the waning of the Middle Ages, moral anxiety dominated. The art of the period (Hieronimus Bosch) was filled with images of judgement and damnation; purgation through pilgrimage was *de rigueur*. The breakdown of feudal absolutism and the rise of secularism, liberalism, democracy, and 'technical' civilisation means that the modern age suffers, above all, from the anxiety of meaninglessness. This is the burden of the art of modernity, of, *inter alia*, Kafka's *The Castle*, Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Sartre's *Age of Reason*, Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Above all, however, it is disclosed by philosophy: not by the 'positivism' of Locke and Hume (DF 195)—a product, we saw, of the complaisant conformism of English society (p.120 above)—but rather by the existentialism of the European continent (CTB 56–62).

Existentialism

Since the eighteenth century, God has been a cultural irrelevance. More fundamentally, modern culture has lost its transparency to the eternal, to the 'depth' dimension to human existence. (As Weber puts it, our world has been 'disenchanted' [GTC I 14–15].) We live 'horizontally' rather than 'vertically', frenetically rather than deeply (ET 1–3). We have lost the meaning-giving structures of the past and our industrial civilisation has failed to provide a substitute. We work so that we can consume and consume so that we can work, a meaningless circle. The great virtue of existentialism is that it reveals, and protests against, the spirit of the industrial age.

Although its roots reach back to Pascal, modern existentialism, observes Tillich, is a German creation, a product of the tensions within the Weimar Republic. It is the work, in particular, of Heidegger and Jaspers (p. 32). It has a distinctive method, attitude, and content.

Its method is a reaction against the Cartesian method. Whereas Descartes' '*Cogito ergo sum*' 'brackets' all of the 'sum' (I am) save thought, existentialism attends to the 'sum' in its totality (CTB 131, TC 87). This was the achievement of Heidegger and Jaspers who combined Husserl's phenomenology, his methodological shift from the third- to the first-person perspective, with the 'philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*)' of, *inter alios*, Schelling, Kierkegaard, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer (TC 76–80).

The 'existential attitude' is one of 'involvement', as opposed to a merely 'theoretical or detached attitude'. It is 'participation' in one's life 'situation' with the whole of one's being (CTB 123–4, TC 89): adopting an existential philosophy makes a difference to one's life.

The content of existentialism is the revelation of our estrangement from our essential being: it reveals the underlying 'despair' (CTB 138 et passim) of modern, industrial, godless existence. Sartre, who takes Heidegger's *Being and Time* to its logical conclusion (CTB 149), says that there is 'no exit' from meaninglessness ('absurdity') (CTB 56), no exit because whatever meaning we find is the product of our own absolute freedom, but which, as such a product, has no authority over us (CTB 150).

Anxiety in its three 'ontological' forms is, to repeat, an inescapable feature of the human condition. What existential philosophy reveals, however, is that while earlier cultural epochs found an answer to anxiety, found the courage to be 'in spite of'—*trotz*, as Luther put it (CTB 160)—anxiety, the secular culture of modernity offers no such answer.

Section II: The answer to our predicament

The theology of culture

Given that he is a Christian philosopher, Tillich's answer to our 'predicament' (TC 42), the predicament disclosed by the valuable—but ultimately nihilistic—philosophy of atheistic existentialism, is predictable: a return to God. Not, however, to the unbelievable God of traditional theology, but rather to a God that does not appear absurd in the light of modern, scientific reason. Following the parable of Martha and Mary—Martha anxiously bustling about concerned with many things, yet all of them 'finite, preliminary, transitory', Mary sitting serenely at Jesus' feet concerned with just one thing, yet one which is 'infinite, ultimate, lasting' (ET 32–3)—Tillich calls this God 'our ultimate concern'.

In every culture, suggests Tillich, it is possible to recognise an unconscious religious base. This is because every culture has an ultimate concern (as Nietzsche

would say, a 'highest value'): 'secular culture is essentially as impossible as atheism, because both presuppose the unconditional element and both express ultimate concerns' (TC 27). 'Religion as ultimate concern', continues Tillich, 'is the meaning-giving substance of a culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself' (TC 42). (There is a formal contradiction between Tillich's frequent presentation of modern culture as 'meaningless' [CTB 147–8, DF 94] and the claim that every culture has a 'meaning-giving substance'. As we shall shortly see, however, his real claim is not that modernity is meaningless but rather that such meaning as it has is unsatisfying and unhealthy.) The key to recognising the 'religion' of a culture is its 'style'. This is because style expresses the 'self-interpretation of man' belonging to a particular culture or cultural epoch. Style is expressed in, and unifies, all of the 'forms', the practices and institutions, that constitute the culture in question (TC 68–72). (This notion of style is likely derived from Spengler who thinks that cultures have 'souls' expressed through their unifying styles [GTC II 106–7].) So, for example, the harmonious and balanced style of the temple expresses the serenity of the Greeks' relationship to their world, the dreaming spire of the Gothic cathedral the aspiring-to-the-infinite (Spengler says 'Faustian') character of medieval culture, and the joyfulness of a David Hockney spring landscape the gaiety of gay culture. (Needless to say these are my own examples—Tillich does not provide any.)

An ultimate concern, we have seen, is one's 'spiritual centre', the meaning that validates all one's subsidiary meanings, one's highest value. The object of such concern can be many things: wealth, success, power, nation, class, culture, or the arrival of the Marxist utopia. Existentially speaking, one's 'god' can be any of these things. If, however, the object of one's 'worship' is something other than the true God, one is engaged in 'idolatry', the elevation of what is at best a subordinate meaning into an ultimate one. An 'idolatrous faith' is characterised by fanaticism, since the idolater 'must repress the doubts which characterise the elevation of something preliminary into ultimacy' (DF 133). It is characterised, too, by 'existential disappointment', since, sooner or later, false gods reveal their falsity (DF 13). Faith carries with it a sense of 'the holy'. If the object of an idolatrous faith is positively 'destructive' (the Nazi state, for instance), then it has become 'demonic', the demonic being the destructive treated as holy (DF 17). The task, then, of overcoming the predicament of modernity is that of living a non-idolatrous religious life, a life devoted to the one and only 'true God', the God who, as Jesus, became human. All other gods are 'less than valid objects of ultimate concern' are, that is, 'idols' (TC 40).

Faith

Religious faith (I shall take 'non-idolatrous' as understood for the time being) does not consist in having an improbable metaphysical belief. It is not 'an act of knowledge with a low degree of evidence' (DF 35). And so, as intimated, the idea that religion and science can contradict each other is mistaken. Since faith is

not a belief, the voluntarism favoured by the Catholics (and by Kierkegaard), the idea that one must overcome the gap between evidence and conclusion by exercising the 'will to believe', is mistaken (DF 41–2). Neither is faith merely a matter of emotion: Schleiermacher's description of religion as 'the feeling of unconditional dependence' is misunderstood if it is taken to reduce faith to a 'subjective emotion' (DF 44–5). Rather, faith is a way of life, the whole of it, not merely a part. Faith is not a special activity reserved for Sundays but concerns, rather, 'every moment of one's life ... every space and every realm'. For the faithful,

[t]he universe is God's sanctuary. Every work day is a day of the Lord, every supper a Lord's supper, every work the fulfilment of a divine task, every joy a joy in God The religious and the secular are not separate realms. Rather they are within each other.

(TC 41)

Tillich's word for this way of life is 'theonomous'. A theonomous life is a life of 'total surrender' to God, a surrender which carries with it the promise of 'total fulfilment' (DF 1).

The difficulty in understanding this non-cognitivist account of faith is that, according to Tillich, faith is always accompanied by 'doubt': it consists in living the theonomous life 'in spite of doubt' (DF 18–25, 116). But how, one wants to ask, can one have doubt without there being a propositional content, a 'belief', to function as the object of doubt? I think Tillich's intended answer is as follows. The religious person really does hold—hold to—the belief that there is, in some sense (a sense I shall come to shortly), a God. The attitude to that belief, however, is not one of assertion, but rather of adoption. Consider, by way of a close analogy, Martin Luther King's faith that 'the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice'. This faith was, for him, I believe, what Kant calls a 'postulate of practical reason', the unprovable but necessary ground of the moral life.⁶ It cannot be proved and cannot be disproved. But it can be doubted: in the face of the 'demonic', faith can falter, can even be destroyed. For Tillich, too, I suggest, that 'God' is not (like 'unicorn') a word without a referent is a 'postulate' of the theonomous life. But while this belief cannot be disproved, it can be shaken by the demonic—as Tillich's faith was shaken by the First World War. What, however, should the theonomous person take to be the referent of 'that tremendous word God' (p. 121 above)? What actually is the 'ultimate concern' that is to be the object of a non-idolatrous faith and commitment?

The ontological God

There are, says Tillich, two ways of approaching God, the 'ontological' and the 'cosmological'. The former was Augustine's, the later Aquinas's. On the first approach, one overcomes estrangement by discovering *oneself* in God, a God in whom one 'participates'. On the second, one encounters God as a 'stranger' with

whom one may or may not manage to establish friendly relations (TC 10, CTB 169). Tillich's use of 'cosmological' is relatively familiar: in approaching God cosmologically, one deploys 'argumentative rationality' (TC 16) to infer from features of the world—purpose, harmony, 'design'—to the necessity of a divine, self-creating, intelligent, personal being who created the world out of nothing. By 'ontological', however, he refers not to St. Anselm's argument that existence is part of God's essence, but rather to the idea that one has 'immediate awareness' of the divine. Unaccompanied by the ontological approach, Tillich believes, the cosmological approach can lead only to the end of religion. In the age of scientific rationality, the idea of the universe as the creation of a supernatural person is, not refuted, but simply not taken seriously. Once, however, we have encountered the divine in immediate experience, we can *then* discover it in features of the world: 'The unconditioned of which we have an immediate awareness, without inference, can be recognised in the cultural and natural universe' (TC 26).⁷ What, however, is this 'unconditioned', and why should we suppose that, if we were to open our eyes, we would experience its presence in the world?

It seems to me significant that one of the philosophers who meant most to Tillich was Schelling, and one of the poets, Rainer Maria Rilke (p. 119 above). Some of Rilke's verses, Tillich writes in the last year of his life, 'move me as deeply as when I first heard them' (ET 252). In one of his *Gedankenlyrik* (philosophical/religious poems), Rilke speaks of the world as a 'venture', a venture initiated by 'nature'—nature in the sense of 'mother nature'. As Heidegger points out, Rilke's poetic vision is rooted in an anti-mechanistic tradition in German metaphysics that runs through the *Lebensphilosophie* of, not only Schelling, but also Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Scheler, and which sees 'will' as the ground and origin of all things (GTC I 242–5).

Tillich, we have seen, rejects ontotheology, the Thomist, 'cosmological' approach which treats God as *a* being. Rather, God is 'being-itself' (p. 122 above), a 'God above God', a God towards whom the God of ontotheology is at best a gesture (CTB 186). As Heidegger realised in writing 'being' with a crossing-out through it, however (p. 54 above), even without the indefinite article, the substantival form of the word still has the appearance of turning God into a being. In his reply to the criticisms of Charles Hartshorne, Tillich accepts this point, saying that he is no longer

disinclined to accept the process-character of being-itself. On the contrary, the idea of a living God seems to me to contradict the Aristotelian-Thomistic doctrine of God as pure actuality.

(TT 339)

Eventually, then, he accepts that 'being', i.e. God, is a temporal process, something of the same order as Rilke's 'venture', which is why he often prefers 'the power of [bringing things into] being' (CTB 27 et passim) to 'being-itself'.

According to Rilke's poem, a poem discussed at length in Heidegger's 'What Are Poets For?' (PLT 87–140, GTC 244–6), 'nature' throws us forth, together with plant and animal, into the 'danger', the danger of existence, mortality. As vulnerable as plant and animal, we are provided with 'no special protection'. But, Rilke continues (in related poems), we are 'not abandoned', not abandoned because the 'primordial ground' holds us in a 'gravitational attraction' to itself, 'the unheard-of-centre'. We are held 'in the balance': the centrifugal force of the initial 'throw' is balanced by a centripetal force, a force to which we may or may not attend. Insensible to the gravitational attraction, modern technological civilisation opposes the venture, with the result that anxiety about death becomes its underlying mood, and the conquest of death its ultimate aim. If, however, we 'go with the venture, will it', make our being in the world a matter of preserving and completing the order of things gifted to us by the venture, then

... there, outside all [technological] protection
this creates for us a safety—just there,
where the pure forces' gravity rules.

It does so because in allowing us to experience the power of the gravitational attraction, we are, as Heidegger puts it, 'appropriated' by the venture. When this happens, when, in Tillich's language, we become 'united' with 'the power of being-itself' (CTB 157), the distinction between the venture and our 'essential' selves, between its will and our own, disappears. And so anxiety about death disappears as well: united with the venture, we share in its undying being.

There are strong echoes of this Rilkean thought in—perhaps surprisingly—*The Socialist Decision* of 1932. Here Tillich speaks neither of God nor of nature but rather of 'the origin', the 'unbroken origin' from which 'comes the power of being' (ET 144). The origin is, he says, 'creative'—in other words, it 'ventures'. We experience ourselves as 'posited' by it to be its agents, yet also as 'independent'. Though independent, however, we are not abandoned: 'the origin does not let us go ... [it] holds us fast' to itself (ET 142): holds us fast, in Rilke's words, in a 'gravitational attraction'.

The Socialist Decision is a relatively early work, but in the last year of his life, Tillich emphasises his affinity with philosopher-poets such as Hölderlin and Rilke: as they do in their 'nature mysticism', he says, he, too, affirms the presence of the infinite in the finite (ET 252). According to their new form of 'realism', he continues, the 'power of nature' is prior to the 'cleavage of our world into subjectivity and objectivity': since there is an 'in-dwelling' (ibid.) between oneself and the origin's venture, the venture is as much the subject of one's experience as its object. If I 'surrender' my life to 'God' (p. 127 above), my mortal self becomes the conduit through which the origin furthers its aims.

If nature is experienced as the origin's creative project, says Tillich, then natural things 'vibrate' with 'transcendental power and meaning'. They become 'sacramental elements' (TB 91). The world is re-enchanted.

Technological civilisation, to repeat, disenchant (p. 124 above). It rebels against the venture—is, in Tillich's language, 'demonic'—and pays the price of threefold anxiety (anxiety about death, guilt, and meaning). What, however, is it to open one's mind and heart to the 'power of being', to achieve 'complete reunion with the divine ground of being' (DF 119)? What is it, in other words, to live the 'theonomous' life?

Theonomy, says Tillich, needs the inspiration of an 'eschatological vision', the vision of a 'perfect theonomy' in which the actual structure of the world is identical with the 'structure of being-in-itself' (TT 336). A special value attaches to the Middle Ages as a model for this 'theonomy of the future' (ET 252). But just how is one to go about promoting 'the *eschaton*'?

Reason, claims Tillich, 'ecstatic reason' (ST I 60), can, through 'contemplation and union', discover the 'logos' of the universe (TB 70). I think that what he means by 'ecstatic' reason is the combination of the 'mystical' sense of one's absorption into the divine venture with the thoughtful attempt to discover what the venture is: what it is that constitutes the structural logos the venture seeks to realise—in traditional language, what it is that constitutes God's plan for the world. Oswald Spengler (and later Heidegger) focuses on architecture as a paradigm of the life that, in Rilke's language, 'goes with' the venture. Unlike the ancient pyramid or modern skyscraper which contradict, challenge, and 'dominate' the landscape, the work of, in Tillich's language, the theonomous builder 'nestles' into and 'espouses' the surrounding landscape. The 'architecture' of the landscape determines the architecture of the building (GTC II 112, GTC I 246–7).

What this suggestive paradigm makes clear is that the turn to the theonomous life is a kind of Copernican revolution: instead of humanity constituting the centre to which the rest of nature must, must be compelled to, accommodate itself, nature's venture becomes that to which we accommodate ourselves. Tillich speaks of the turn to the theonomous life, a turn that is modelled on the life of Jesus, as that acquisition of a 'new being' (TB 91, ST I 43, et passim), as, in other words, a 'rebirth'. Undergoing this Copernican revolution is, I believe, what he means by acquiring a new being. (Notice the coincidence of the theonomous life with the life of the deep ecologist: conservation of nature's 'logos' is central to both lives. But notice, too, that, since human beings are also parts of nature, the theonomous life also conserves the 'natural' structure of human life. A certain, thoughtful kind of 'social conservatism' belongs to the 'conservation of nature'.)

Ethics

Tillich distinguishes between 'basic considerations' concerning the theonomous life, his account of which I have tried to represent in the previous section,

and 'concrete applications', under which he discusses ethics. What, then, is 'theonomous ethics' (TC 133)?

As Kant shows, says Tillich, whatever its content, the form of the moral imperative is 'categorical'. The moral 'ought' is 'unconditional' (TC 133), absolute. But no command issued by a source external to the self, believes Tillich, can be unconditional: 'A stranger, even if his name were God', cannot issue an unconditional command, for the command that is unconditional can only come from the self. As Heidegger shows, the call of conscience is the self calling to the self: acting on the moral command is 'self-affirmation' (TC 136–8). This, however, is quite different from self-affirmation in terms of individual desires and fears because what is affirmed is the essential, not the actual self (TC 135–8).

Recall that it is only when we approach God 'cosmologically' that he appears as a 'stranger' (p. 127 above). When, as one should, one approaches God 'ontologically', when one lives theonomously, one 'discovers oneself', one's 'essential', aspirational self, in God. And so the moral command is *both* God's command and one's own. What Tillich is doing here, it seems to me, is dissolving the antinomy between moral heteronomy and moral autonomy. For one who 'surrenders' to the power of being there is no antinomy: God's command and one's own are one and the same.

While the form of the moral command is unconditional, its content is not. It is, rather, relative to context, to cultural and personal circumstances. Diverse 'moralisms', moral systems and traditions, develop and are adopted by particular cultures and historical epochs. This, the 'relativity of all concrete ethics', is not to be confused with 'relativism': that anthropologists and psychologists record the endless differences between ethical ideals is no argument against the unconditional validity of the moral imperative (TC 135–7). Particular ethical systems are, that is, interpretations of the unconditional moral command attuned to particular circumstances. Generally, such interpretations are valid, though not always. If their conditionality and relativity is not recognised, they can develop into rigid and oppressive laws, into 'moralism' in other words.⁸ The Catholic interpretation of 'natural law' is an example of this: since the Catholic Church fails to understand the 'dynamic', adaptable, character of the content of the moral imperative, it assumes, oppressively, that the ban on birth control is an eternal moral principle. Rightly understood, natural law is the law that is implied in man's essential nature. This, as stated by Jesus, is 'the one, all-embracing law, the "Great Commandment" of love'. Justice is also important, but finds itself 'fulfilled' in love: there is 'nothing higher' than love (TC 135–8). Love, Tillich emphasises, is not an emotion, at least not exclusively so. Rather, it is a 'principle of life' (TC 144)—the principle of the theonomous life, the principle, of course, not of eros but of agape. As Heidegger puts it, it is the principle of 'caring-for' the elements of the venture (GTC I 247–50).

Tillich says that ‘without the reunion of man with his essential nature no perfect moral act is possible’ (TC 142). One cannot, however, will that reunion, will oneself to live within the venture: although one can prepare to do so—by, for example, reading Rilke—the turn to the theonomous life is ultimately a matter of receptivity, a gift of ‘grace’. And if one receives the gift then one fulfils the moral command not dutifully, but with joy. Only in estrangement does the moral requirement appear as law. When we are reunited with our essential being there is no law but only love (TC 141–3).

Love is creative: it creates within the various ‘spheres of meaning’ (CTB 45) of human life (TC 144, CTB 45). But since there is no mechanical procedure for determining the content of the moral command in a particular circumstance (as Gadamer emphasises with respect to legal hermeneutics [GTC I 175–6], the application of principles is an art not a science), it is always possible that one makes a mistake. The morality of the theonomous life is thus a ‘morality of risk’ (TC 138). This is a prime motive for the retreat into an attitude of rigid ‘moralism’: by pretending that the content of the moral commandment is fixed and specific, one seeks to immunise oneself against ‘guilt and tragedy’ (TC 138–41).

Politics

Thus Tillich’s account of theonomous ethics. What, now, of ‘theonomous politics’? How does the theonomous life manifest itself in the political ‘sphere of meaning’?

Prior to his forced emigration from Germany, we saw, Tillich’s answer was ‘religious socialism’, the practical as well as theoretical project of unifying religion with the labour movement on which he collaborated with Martin Buber. That this remained his answer after his emigration to America required courage, given that much of his time in America coincided with the McCarthyite period, the period of the witch-hunt for—generally falsely accused—communists. On account of his socialist past in Germany, together with his friend Reinhold Niebuhr, Tillich was regularly followed by J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI agents, and Tillich’s works were, for a time, blacklisted by the U.S. Army. As Tillich says, to continue to espouse socialism, to criticise capitalism, and even to express a measure of agreement with Marx (p. 133 below), was ‘unwelcome and even dangerous’ in his adopted country (ET 261).

The goal of the theonomous life is the ‘sovereignty of God’. It follows, says Tillich, that ‘the unconditional’ is the ‘prius’ of all theonomous political action (TB 57). But what, in concrete terms, does that entail?

We are not, as we saw, our own creation. We are rather ‘posited’ by the ‘origin’ (p. 129 above) an origin which allows us the freedom to, in Rilke’s language, either ‘go with’ or go against its creative will. All ‘conservative and romantic political thought’ is oriented towards the ‘myth of origin’, a myth

that gives the origin normative status. Any attempt to deviate from it appears as an affront, as sacrilege. The 'breaking of the myth of origin', by contrast, is the 'root of liberal, democratic, and socialist thought in politics'. The truth of the matter, however, is that, because we are imperfect beings, the actual origin is never the 'true origin', never 'that which is intended for humanity from the origin'. 'Origin' is, that is, 'ambiguous': conservatives fail to understand the imperfection of the actual origin of a community (in, for instance, a slave society), and progressives err if they fail to see that, to have genuine normative force, the demand for social change must be rooted in our essential nature: it must be a 'demand of our own essence', of, that is, the true origin, of the venture itself. As we have seen, that demand is the demand of love, a demand which grounds the demand for justice. This is the demand for the 'recognition of the equal dignity of the "Thou" and the "I"'. (Since this is Buber's language, and since Buber holds that the 'essential principle' of political life is Kant's principle that one should always treat human beings as ends and never merely as means [p. 151 below], this, the grounding principle of liberalism, is presumably what Tillich means by 'justice'.) Thus, when it comes to politics, 'justice is the true power of being. In it the intention of the origin is fulfilled'. The aim of religious socialism is therefore, social justice, the freedom and dignity of all human beings (ET 140–5).

As with moral demands in general, that which constitutes the freedom and dignity of the individual is context-sensitive. Religious socialism, says Tillich, is not committed to any political party. Rather it 'keeps an eye open' for theonomous elements in all parties. Given the current situation, however, religious socialism accepts the Marxist critique of capitalism, while rejecting the rest of Marxist doctrine (TB 65, ET 261). It is, surely, the Kantian principle of liberalism that marks the parting of the ways between religious socialism and Marxism–Leninism.

Religious socialism regards capitalism as 'demonic'. Nazism, however, is far more demonic: Protestants who compromise with the Nazis, Tillich bravely writes in 1932, compromise with 'paganism' and 'demonic power' (TB 117). Nationalism, attachment to a particular place, not merely Nazi nationalism but nationalism in all its forms, Tillich also regards as demonic. It is inevitably imperialistic and a source of conflict since the 'gods' of one place inevitably struggle against the 'gods' of another (TC 32–3). As the European Union is, on the whole, now demonstrating, this is empirically false. Why Tillich fails to distinguish between nationalism as aggression towards the other and nationalism as love of one's own, why he rules out of court the possibility of the Kantian principle of justice reigning between nation states as well as between individuals, is unexplained. And his views on nationalism seem not to be properly developed since in the very next breath he says that 'nobody can deny the tremendous creativity of national community' and that 'nobody would willingly deprive himself of the physical and psychological space which is his nation'

(ibid.). It seems likely that his blanket hostility to nationalism is an overgeneralisation from its Nazi manifestation.

Section III: Two questions

In this section, I intend to discuss two questions that arise from Tillich's account of theonomous life. First, is it really a *Christian* account? Second, is the theonomous life still subject to anxiety?

Is Tillich really a Christian?

Tillich is a leading member of what became known as the 'death of God' movement within the Christian theology of the mid-twentieth century, the movement that sought to liberate Christianity from, as John Bishop has called him, 'the omiGod': a male, personal being who is all-powerful, all-knowing, wholly good, and who, uncreated himself, created the world out of nothing.⁹ Death of God theology is, of course, not atheism. It seeks not to abandon Christianity, but rather to find an alternative conception adequate to, and consistent with, the Christian faith. Tillich certainly articulates an alternative conception of God. But is there anything specifically Christian about it? Was Tillich, in other words, really, a *Christian* thinker at all? What raises this question is the fact that, in expounding his thought, I have frequently referred to poets and philosophers, but to the Bible hardly at all. To be sure, Tillich regularly correlates Christian themes with the substance of his thought, the parable of Mary and Martha (p. 125 above), for example, but are these correlations anything more than dutiful appendages? Could the substance of his thought not be stated without any reference to Christianity at all? Tillich's commitment to 'the religious' as the central element in the flourishing of both individual and communal life is unquestionable, but is there any real reason to suppose that this religious foundation has to be of a specifically Christian character? As with Scheler (GTC II 154), Tillich's view on this question underwent a startling twist at the end of his life.

How do we know about God? Through, we have seen, a way of seeing the world, an 'immediate awareness' of the divine, a divinity that is both immanent and transcendent, immanent as a 'hidden power' but, as hidden, also transcendent, transcendent of conceptual thought (TC 63–4). But how are we to articulate and communicate that awareness? Through 'symbols', says Tillich. All religious language is symbolic, even the word 'God': the 'idea of God' is symbolic for something that is non-symbolic, namely 'Being-itself' (TC 61, ST I 264).

Like 'signs', symbols point to something beyond themselves. Unlike signs, however, they 'participate in the meaning and power' of that which is symbolised. While a road sign does not participate in the road condition it represents,

a national flag does participate in the dignity of the nation for which it stands, which is why an attack on the flag is felt as an attack on the majesty of the nation and is experienced as blasphemy (DF 48, TC 55). Like the flag, religious symbols open up a level of reality 'for which non-symbolic speaking is inadequate', a level inaccessible to conceptual thought. A Rubens landscape opens up the heroic quality of the landscape, a quality which can be revealed in no other way. Religious symbols open up the 'depth dimension' of a culture, the deepest of all its 'levels', namely, 'the holy' (TC 58–9).

Symbols can be misused, with the result that they become 'idolatrous' (DF 51 et passim). Without being explicit about it, Tillich actually uses 'idolatry' in two senses. In the first of these, an idol is the symbol of a false god, the elevation of a 'preliminary' concern into an ultimate one. One form of this kind of idolatry we have already met: the worship of wealth, power, prestige, and so on. (So, for example, a Lamborghini or a Nobel Prize might count as idols.) And, at least in 1959, it seems that, for Tillich, non-Christian forms of worship also count as worship of false gods. 'Christianity', he writes, 'claims that the God who is manifested in Jesus the Christ is the true God, the true subject of an ultimate and unconditional concern', and therefore that 'all other gods are less than valid objects of an ultimate concern, and if they are made into one, become idols' (TC 49). In the second sense, however, idolatry is the *identification* of the symbol with the symbolised. This can happen with a national flag but even more easily with a religious symbol. While this form of idolatry can happen in any religion, it is clear that Tillich's prime target is Catholicism, its attribution of divine powers to the statue of Mary and its insistence that the bread and wine of the Eucharist are the literal body and blood of Christ. Against this latter kind of idolatry Tillich deploys what he calls his 'Protestant principle', the principle that religious symbols—words, ideas, artworks, and so on—point, but *merely* point, beyond themselves and do not, therefore, provide a definitive account of the divine. Against the tendency of both Catholics and the fundamentalist Protestants he encountered in America to insist on the literal, non-symbolic status of things and texts, Tillich says that a valid symbol always contains an element of 'self-negation': 'the Protestant principle does not accept any truth of faith as ultimate, except the one that no man possesses it' (DF 112–14).

As O. Douglas Schwarz points out,¹⁰ the Protestant principle raises the problem of religious relativism: if religious doctrine is merely symbolic, might not one religion's set of symbols be just as good as another's? In 1959, we have seen, Tillich provides a negative answer: the gods of non-Christian religions are 'idols', their symbols pointing in the wrong direction. What makes Christianity 'superior' (DF 114) to all other religions is

the extraordinary character of the events on which it is based, namely the creation of a new reality within and under the conditions of man's predicament. Jesus as

the bringer of this new reality is subject to these conditions, to finitude and anxiety, to law and tragedy, to conflict and death. But he victoriously keeps unity with God, sacrificing himself as Jesus to himself as the Christ. In doing so he creates a new reality of which the Church is the communal and historical embodiment.

(TC 40–1)

What is unique about Christian symbolism, in other words, is that the symbol of the crucified Christ is the best expression of the appearance of ‘the ultimate’ in the manifest world (DF 113–14). His double nature as both the man Jesus and Christ the Saviour is the best symbol we have for the ‘experience of the infinite in the finite’ (DF 73). In short, the Protestant principle makes Protestantism the best version of Christianity, and the narrative surrounding the crucifixion makes Christianity superior to all other religions.

Eight years later and ten days before his death, however, following a visit to Japan and an encounter with Shintoism, Tillich delivered a public lecture entitled ‘The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian’. In it, he insists that ‘revelatory experiences are universally human’ and states that he ‘separate[s] himself’ from ‘a theology which rejects all religions other than that of which [one] is a theologian’.¹¹

Jesus says, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the light, no one comes to the Father except through me’ (John 14:6). In the end, this is something Tillich rejects. Christianity is not ‘superior’ to the other world religions; their gods are no longer claimed to be idols. While this opens up the possibility of an irenic relation between different religions, it returns us to the question of whether Tillich himself can be regarded as a Christian.

Schwarz believes that he can be. The discovery that Protestantism is not inherently superior to other religions, he observes, does not imply that anyone should abandon Protestantism. And given Tillich’s insistence that ‘theology remains rooted in its experiential basis’ and the fact that his own experience was mediated by the symbols of Protestantism, he himself remained a Christian without demanding that anyone else should make that the basis of their religious life.¹²

I am inclined to disagree. As intimated earlier, what inclines me to do so is the possibility of stating everything important about the theonomous life without reference to the Bible or resort to specifically Christian symbolism. It is true that the crucifixion is an image of the ‘presence of the infinite in the finite’. But so is the myth of Dionysus, torn apart by the Titans but then reborn, the god of the vine who dies in the winter and is reborn in the spring—the myth on which the account of the crucifixion in St. John’s Gospel may have been based. And so, too, are Cézanne’s numinous images of the blue infinity radiating through a partially deconstructed Monte Sainte-Victoire. In them, as Tillich himself observes, the painter ‘battled with the form that depicts self-sufficient finitude and restored things their real metaphysical meaning’ (P 76).

‘Nature mysticism’ in all its forms, we saw him saying, makes us aware of ‘the presence of the infinite in everything finite’ (p. 136 above).

It is true (as Nietzsche observed) that Jesus brings with him a ‘new being’ (p. 131 above), the ethics of agape. But as I argued above (p. 129), what is essential to this new being is the turn to ‘going with’ rather than against the divine venture. Jesus is certainly a model of such a life—‘not my will, but thine be done’, he says on the eve of the cross—but he is by no means the essential or only one. In my judgment, therefore, Christianity is a dutiful rather than essential part of Tillich’s thought—recall that he felt his natural vocation to be not theology but rather philosophy (p. 120 above). Like Heidegger, he is, beyond question, a religious philosopher. But I doubt that he is a Christian one.

Is anxiety really inescapable?

Anxiety in its three forms is, we saw Tillich asserting, part of the ‘existential structure’ that defines the human condition (pp. 122–3 above). Hence, it seems, the ‘courage to be’, the courage to ‘self-affirm’, is always the courage to be *in spite of* omnipresent anxiety, in spite of ‘nonbeing’. And at least sometimes, it seems that religion makes no difference to this: ‘faith accepts “in spite of”’, out of which ‘courage is born’ (CTB 172): ‘he who has the courage to affirm his being in spite of fate and guilt has not removed them’ (CTB 176).

Anxiety can plausibly be described as the condition of modernity. But the idea that it is the condition of all human beings, religious and non-religious alike, seems implausible. Tillich emphasises, to be sure, that anxiety is ‘by no means ... an always actualised state of mind’. Rather, it is the underlying ‘awareness of one’s finitude’ which makes possible the appearance of anxiety as an ‘acute experience’ (DF 23–4). (Anxiety at this point appears to have reduced to anxiety about ‘fate and death’.) Anxiety, it seems, is our underlying mood rather than an occurrent feeling. But that, too, as a universal claim, seems implausible. More importantly, it leaves us with the question: if faith does not overcome anxiety where is the ‘total fulfilment’ that is promised by ‘surrender’ to God (p. 127 above)? A further difficulty is that sometimes, Tillich appears to say that faith *does* overcome anxiety. All the forms of existential anxiety are, he says, ‘objects of salvation’, salvation being, as we have seen (p. 123 above), the ‘healing’ of anxiety.

Tillich’s account of anxiety is, then, as he admits with respect to his philosophy in general, subject to ‘competitive motives of thought’ (p. 121 above). Which of the competing motifs should be accepted as belonging to the core of his thought? Clearly, I would say, the idea that, in the truly theonomous life, anxiety about ‘nonbeing’ is healed, overcome. This follows from the repeated account of the theonomous person’s relation to God—to the venture—as a matter of ‘in-dwelling’, ‘complete reunion with the divine ground of being’ (p. 130 above). As we saw Rilke pointing out, if one’s identity is absorbed into

that of God (if, as Meister Eckhart's disciple put it, one 'becomes God'),¹³ then one shares in 'his' undying nature and thus enters a realm of 'safety' (p. 129 above) from death. Properly thought out, the theonomous life overcomes anxiety about death, and the other forms of anxiety as well. Moments of anxiety remain, to be sure. But anxiety as a fundamental mood cannot be part of the theonomous life.

Notes

- 1 In the story within the story of the *Brothers Karamazov*, the Grand Inquisitor claims that the only powers capable of keeping the faithful faithful—for their own good—are 'miracle, mystery, and authority'.
- 2 Tillich, H. (1973).
- 3 In modern German, all nouns begin with capital letters. One of Tillich's residual Germanisms is an excessive use of capitals: neither 'existential problem' nor 'existence' should have capital 'E's.
- 4 Here, clearly, is the distinction that grounded the 'philosophical counseling' movement that began in the 1970s.
- 5 Tillich actually writes 'anomism', probably another unintentional neologism.
- 6 In section 87 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argues that, unless one can discover a 'moral governor' of the universe endowing it with a 'moral teleology', given the quantity of evil in the world, one must, in the end, acknowledge the futility of one's moral efforts and succumb to 'despair'.
- 7 Although, as we shall see, Tillich's conception of the divine is close to Jaspers', he rejects Jaspers' term 'philosophical faith' (p. 53 above) because it blurs the distinction between the cosmological and ontological approaches, confuses the 'truth of faith' with 'philosophical truth' (DF 108).
- 8 Tillich distinguishes between the pejorative 'moralism', which has no plural, and the non-pejorative 'moralisms', the various ethical traditions (TC 133).
- 9 Bishop (2009).
- 10 Schwarz (1986).
- 11 Schwarz (1986) 111.
- 12 Schwarz (1986) 113.
- 13 Schopenhauer (1966) II 612.

5 Martin Buber

I and thou

Martin Buber was born in Vienna in 1878 to Jewish parents who divorced when he was three years old. He saw his mother only once thereafter in what he described as a ‘mismatching’. Because of the divorce, he moved to the care of his grandparents, who lived on their country estate outside Lemberg. Now the Ukrainian city of Lvov, Lemberg was then the capital of Galicia, a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At the age of fourteen, he moved into his now-remarried father’s house in Lemberg itself.

Unsurprisingly, given the ethnic diversity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Buber grew up in a multilingual environment. He became fluent in German, Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, English, French, and Italian, and had a reading knowledge of Spanish, Latin, Greek, and Dutch. His multilingual youth, he records in his ‘Autobiographical Fragment’, opened his eyes to the different perspectives different languages bring to the world (B 5–6). Subsequent to its demise in 1918, the Empire became an object of a great deal of Jewish nostalgia on account of its racial and religious tolerance, particularly towards Jews. Buber is no exception. Although he attended a Catholic high school, he records, it was so permeated by the Empire’s spirit of ‘mutual understanding’ that he never encountered antisemitism from either teachers or students (S 8).

At fourteen, he became tormented by the infinity of space and time, a torment relieved only by reading Kant’s *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, from which he learnt that space and time are ‘only forms of our perception’. This led to quasi-religious musing—if time is only a form and limitation of the mind does it not follow that we ourselves are ‘timeless ... in eternity’? (B 13)—and to a youthful disposition to mysticism (p. 168 below). Shortly thereafter, he became obsessed with Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, an ‘invasion’ of his thinking that it took him years to expel. Whereas Kant had given him philosophical freedom, he says, Nietzsche deprived him of it (B 12). (Stylistically, Nietzsche’s influence persisted until at least 1923: the aphoristic alternation between flights of expressionistic poetry and short bouts of tight argument in *I and Thou* owes an unmistakable debt to *Zarathustra*. And just as *Zarathustra* is by no means Nietzsche’s best book, neither is *I and Thou* Buber’s.)

From 1896 to 1899, Buber studied in Vienna and then Leipzig, where he participated in the psychiatric clinics of Wilhelm Wundt. For a time he considered

becoming a psychiatrist. He spent the summer of 1899 at the University of Zürich where he met his eventual wife, Paula Winkler, a non-Jewish Zionist writer who converted from Catholicism to Judaism. (Since she did not convert until 1907, and therefore could not have a Jewish wedding, the Bubers' two children, born in 1900 and 1901, were born out of wedlock.) In 1900, the Bubers moved to Berlin where Martin studied with Dilthey and Georg Simmel. He later said that his focus on dialogue was a response to their monological conception of 'experience', but, as we shall see, both Dilthey's distinction between 'explanation' and 'understanding' (pp. 15–28 above) and his account of what is popularly known as 'empathy' appear in Buber's own work. In Berlin, Buber met and developed a close friendship with the anarchist pacifist Gustav Landauer, who, as we shall see, deeply influenced his political thinking. Landauer (the grandfather of the American film director Mike Nichols) was murdered by proto-fascist forces in 1919.

Long fascinated by the Hasidic tradition in Judaism, Buber had joined the Zionist movement in 1898. In 1902, he broke with the 'political Zionism' of Theodor Herzl, supporting instead the 'cultural Zionism' of Ahad Ha-am (Asher Ginsberg). As Buber remarks (B 16–19), the division was as much about personalities and the allocation of money as about principles, but roughly, while cultural Zionism wished to establish in Palestine a centre for the revival of Jewish culture, an ambition compatible with an ethnically neutral state, political Zionism sought to establish a Jewish state, a state in which at least first-class citizenship would be confined to Jews.

From 1901, when Buber became editor of the Zionist weekly *Die Welt*, until his departure for Israel in 1938, he was engaged in various literary efforts to promote cultural Zionism. In 1925, for instance, he began, with Franz Rosenzweig, the herculean task of translating the Hebrew Bible into German—a task not completed until 1961. In 1930, he became an honorary professor at the University of Frankfurt but resigned (he would otherwise have been sacked) when the Nazis came to power in 1933. He remained in Germany until the last possible moment, attempting to defend Jews and Judaism against Nazi propaganda. Arriving in British-controlled Palestine in 1938, he became professor of anthropology and sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he remained until his retirement in 1951. He was one of the founders of the Ihud (Unity) political party that advocated a binational state of Israel (pp. 140, 158 below). He died in 1965. Leading politicians attended his funeral in Jerusalem, classes were cancelled for the day, and students lined the streets to witness the passing of the funeral cortege.

During the last decades of his life, Buber travelled and lectured widely in Europe and the United States. Although he is now something of a forgotten figure,¹ he became, in the 1950s and 1960s, a world-famous spiritual-intellectual leader with the same kind of global recognition as Jung, Gandhi, Bertrand Russell, Sartre, and Camus. *I and Thou* was translated into 23 languages, with

the first of the two English translations appearing in 1938. Buber's 'philosophy of dialogue' influenced the theology of Paul Tillich and of Reinhold Niebuhr, the psychotherapy of Carl Rogers, and the civil rights activism of Martin Luther King, who wrote in his 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' that segregation reduces the 'I-thou' relation between people to an 'I-it' relation. Buber conducted a voluminous correspondence with almost every leading cultural figure of the day: with Georg Simmel, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Herman Hesse, Stefan Zweig, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Albert Camus, Walter Benjamin, Francois Mauriac (to whom he wrote in French), Eleanor Roosevelt, and Bertrand Russell, as well as with Jewish politicians such as Theodor Herzl and David Ben-Gurion. He received many prizes and honours in Germany and the United States, and was nominated for a Nobel peace prize by Dag Hammarskjöld, the then secretary-general of the United Nations, for his work on behalf of Arab-Jewish rapprochement.

The collected works of Martin Buber run to 21 door-stopping volumes. At least five of these volumes are directly concerned with philosophy. In this chapter, I intend to focus on the following central works: *I and Thou* (*Ich und Du*) (1923); *Paths in Utopia* (1945); *Between Man and Man* (1947); *Knowledge of Man* (1951); and *Eclipse of God* (1952). (Since, with the exception of *Paths in Utopia*, all of the works subsequent to *I and Thou* are collections of essays written at different times, these publication dates are somewhat misleading.) Buber presents the works subsequent to *I and Thou* as expansions and clarifications of this, the magnum opus. This suggestion that the totality of his thought is already present in *I and Thou* seems to me, however, somewhat misleading. While there is no 'turning' in Buber's thought on the magnitude of Wittgenstein's or Heidegger's, much of his best thought seems to me not even implicit in *I and Thou*.

The basic shape of Buber's philosophy is clear and simple. There is, he argues, a fundamental dichotomy between the 'I-thou' and the 'I-it' relation to things and people. Modernity is in bad shape because the second relation has eclipsed the first. The remedy is the restoration of the I-thou relationship, the 'dialogical principle'. Now for the details.

Section I: *I and Thou*

The way we are now

Like nearly every other twentieth-century German thinker, Buber holds that we live in a time of 'decay' (PU 14), a decay that has now become a crisis: since 1914, since, for the first time, the entire world has turned to war, everyone recognises that humanity faces its 'greatest crisis' (PU 129). And, like almost every other German thinker, he identifies loss of freedom and loss of community as the two central pathologies of modernity.

Since the rise of bourgeois society initiated by the French Revolution, the complementary forces of capitalism and the centralised state have reduced us to 'cogs in the ... machine' (PU 132). Industrial, assembly-line manufacture has reduced us to cogs in the industrial machine, and the centralised, necessarily bureaucratic, modern state has reduced us to cogs in the state machine. In two ways, therefore, we are reduced from people to things by the 'golem' of modern social and industrial technology, a golem that knows only 'objects', never 'human beings' (IT 93). And so we are deprived of our freedom: either implicitly or explicitly, 'totalitarianism' is the modern condition (MM 131). The golem, moreover, is one over which we have lost control: 'man is no longer able to master the world which he himself has brought about ... he no longer knows the word which could render harmless the golem he has created' (MM 187). Not merely unfortunate individuals but humanity as a whole has become enslaved by the Frankensteinian monster it has created.

Together with freedom, community, too, has been destroyed. The golem of the industrial-political complex that knows no personal life knows no community either (IT 93). The centralised modern state has 'hollowed out' all the local forms of community that had developed 'organically' in pre-bourgeois society (PU 13-5): 'atomised' individuals can no longer relate to local bodies but are compelled to relate directly to a state in which they are 'yoke[d] together [with] totally uncongenial citizens' (IT 94). The multiple 'cells' of community that existed in pre-modern society, guilds, villages, monasteries, churches, and mercantile leagues, have been obliterated by the all-mighty state (PU 77-80). The 'centralistic political principle' has triumphed over the 'decentralistic social principle' (PU 131). People are now supposed to be brought into community by 'free, exuberant feeling', but genuine community can only be built on 'a living, reciprocal relationship to a single centre' (p. 155 below), never on feelings alone (IT 94).

Loss of community, Buber believes, generates a number of pathologies. First, the absence of 'solidarity' (PU 65) results in a pervasive aloneness: in his 'solitary', 'monological', isolated existence (p. 151 below), Kierkegaard is the archetypal modern individual. Second, loss of community generates 'homelessness' (*Hauslosigkeit*). There are epochs in which humanity is 'housed' in the world (possesses *Behautheit*), and epochs, like ours, in which it is not (MM 150) (p. 172 below). Third, loss of community is loss of meaning: loss of 'tradition', loss of the shared 'spirit' of a culture that, in the past, gave meaning to our lives. In the past, we were born into a heritage of ethical ideals. New members of the community were introduced to ethical paradigms: 'the Christian, the gentleman, the citizen'. But now all these figures have been (as we now say) cancelled, their statues broken. We no longer know to what the newcomer should be educated (MM 121). As Nietzsche was the first to realise, we exist in a state of 'nihilism' (EG 97 et passim), a time, as Hölderlin and Heidegger rightfully put it, of 'night' (EG 17). And with loss of meaning comes the loss of

a higher kind of ('positive') freedom. Since communal 'destiny' (*Schicksal*) and freedom are promised to each other' (IT 102), we are denied the opportunity of self-realisation, the opportunity to 'become what we are' (KM 128–32), what we are 'meant to become' (KM 182; see further 151–2 below). Modern society has become 'amorphous, unarticulated, poor in structure' (PU 14). Without ethical structure, there can be neither meaning nor self-realisation.

Buber tries to sum all this up by saying that we live in an 'it-world' rather than a 'thou-world'. The 'I-it' relation has become so 'gigantically swollen' (EG 111) that it excludes the 'I-thou' relation. The 'I' that cannot say 'thou' is 'lord of the hour'. But the situation is not hopeless. As Hölderlin says (also one of Heidegger's favourite quotations), 'where the danger is, there grows the saving power also' (IT 105; Buber quotes this in paraphrased form). The 'I' that can say 'thou', the 'I' of community, has not been extinguished but has rather 'gone into the catacombs' (EG 111) whence it can still come forth. What, then, is this I-thou relation and what is the I-it relation that has eclipsed it? I shall begin with the initial account of the two relationships provided by *I and Thou*.

I-thou and I-it

For those who do not read German. In Buber's German, the two relations are *Ich-Du* and *Ich-Es*. *Du* is the intimate version of the second person singular, the version one traditionally confines to family, friends, and lovers. But there is also a formal version that one uses to address everyone else—*Sie*. Buber never discusses the *Ich-Sie* relation, a point to which I shall return.

Every translation of *Ich-Du* is wrong. While *I and Thou* is the title of Walter Kaufmann's translation, he chooses 'I-You' for the body of the text, which fails to capture the intimacy of the *Du*, while (except in Yorkshire) the 'thou' of 'I-thou' is both too old fashioned and too religious. I shall stick to the 'thou' of Kaufmann's title (without capitalising the 'T'), though occasionally I shall leave both *Du*, and later *Sie*, untranslated.

The thou-relation

'The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude' (IT 53). Thus the first sentence of *I and Thou*. One approaches things either in terms of the I-thou or else in terms of the I-it relation.

As indicated, the most familiar instance of the *Du* relation is the intimate relationship with another human being. The first aspect of the relation is 'presence': the other appears not as an 'object' (*Gegenstand*) but as 'presence' (*Gegenwart*). What is presence?

When the other is present, one does not 'observe' or 'experience' them because that turns them into an object, an it. And neither does one categorise them after the manner of a psychologist as a particular type of human being (anal-retentive,

narcissist), or in terms of some 'purpose' that might make them useful to one (plumber, IT expert). When one is receptive to the other as a thou, they are 'immediately' present: 'nothing conceptual intervenes between I and thou'. Presence has implications for the phenomenology of time and space. 'As prayer is not in time but time in prayer, the sacrifice not in space but space in the sacrifice', so 'I do not find the human being to whom I say thou in any sometime and somewhere'. One might think of how awareness of the passage of time disappears in intense conversation with a friend (as it does in playing music)—though there is, of course, a temporal ordering within the conversation—and of how the background sights and sounds of the café disappear as well. Both phenomena point to the exclusion of everything other than the thou, to the other becoming, for a moment, 'my world'. The other, says Buber, 'fills the firmament'; other entities appear only 'in the light of' the thou (IT 57–62). (There are people—Bill Clinton and the Dalai Lama—who are renowned for making one feel that, in a brief, dialogical moment, one is the only person in the world that matters to them.)

The second feature of the thou-relation is the removal of all defensiveness, all 'barriers' between the self and the other (IT 68). One appears as a 'whole human being' (warts and all) and hence 'without reserve' (IT 137). Nietzsche once said that one should not be asked to appear before others 'in one's shirt-sleeves'.² Buber disagrees.

The third feature of the thou-relation is 'affirmation', indeed love (IT 68). (In later works, we shall see, Buber will revise the identification of affirmation with love.) Love is not, he says, a 'feeling'. Jesus' feeling for his disciples was very different from his feeling towards the man possessed by a devil, but his love was the same for both (IT 66). Love—as agape rather than eros, of course—is readiness for action, not a feeling.

Thus far, Buber's description of the thou-relation seems to present a recognisable phenomenon. Now, however, things become more challenging. There are, he says, three regions to which the duality between the I-thou and the I-it relation applies: other human beings, 'spiritual' beings,³ and, what I want to attend to here, nature (IT 53–7). Within each of the spheres, says Buber, either attitude may prevail. This implies, in particular, that both nature as a whole and particular natural beings can presence as thous, a view Buber explicitly affirms (though he will later regret doing so). The botanist contemplates a tree as an 'it', a member of a particular species. The timber merchant also contemplates it as an 'it', as 'timber'. But 'it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an it' and becomes instead a thou (IT 58). Even inorganic nature can become a thou. Buber recalls an experience in which, contemplating a fragment of mica, it suddenly broke through the 'crust of thinghood' and became a thou (IT 146).

The idea of an intimacy with nature which we once had but which, as a culture, we have now lost resonates with Schiller's distinction (in *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*) between the 'naïve' and the 'sentimental': the archaic

Greek felt himself to be part of nature as a flower is part of nature, while 'sentimental' modern poets such as himself yearn to recover humanity's lost union with nature. One of the ambiguities in *I and Thou* is that it offers, or at least suggests, two different accounts of this lost union. 'Primitive' peoples, says Buber, were 'poor in objects', had no its, only thous (IT 69). What this calls to mind is animism: our ancestors had no its because everything—wind, rain, trees, and so on—was a living spirit. Notice, however, that for there to be a thou attitude there needs to be a distinguishable 'I', and hence a differentiation between the subject of the attitude and its grammatical or intentional object. But what Buber actually says by way of characterising the union with nature that we have lost, is that, for our ancestors, there were no 'I's. As the child in the womb is not yet differentiated from the mother, so the experience of primitive humanity was of a character to which our categories of subject and object do not apply. Whereas we would say 'I see a tree', early humanity, so seems to be the idea,⁴ would say 'Treeing here' (IT 69–73). Early humanity, in other words, had a 'pure event ontology', an ontology devoid of substances. So on the one hand, we have the idea of a differentiated but *intimate* relation with nature, and on the other, the idea of a non-differentiated or *unity*-relation with nature.

The idea of unity is explicitly present in Buber's earlier work *Daniel*, where, contemplating the piece of mica, he says that at the end of the experience, he realised that 'while looking at it I had known nothing of "subject" and "object"; as I looked, the piece of mica and "I" had been one: as I looked, I had tasted unity'.⁵ In later works, we shall see, he rejects the idea of understanding the blissful union between self and 'other' in terms of the 'becoming one' of Schiller's 'naivety'—emphatically so, probably because this was once his own view. What is common to both the explicit view and the suggested view, however, is 'sentimentality' in Schiller's non-pejorative sense: while it is our inescapable 'lot', the loss of our ancestors' union with nature (however that is to be understood), is a source of profound 'melancholy' (IT 90, 146). When, in the thou-relation, we recover something of our ancestors' bliss, we are no longer 'alienated' (IT 111).

Our relation to 'spiritual' beings is our relation to the 'eternal Thou', namely God. (Possibly to angels, too, but these do not appear in *I and Thou*.) If we fully inhabit the thou attitude, we are related to God in both of the other two regions of the thou:

In every sphere, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze towards the hem (*Saum*) of the eternal Thou: in each we perceive a breath of it; in every thou we address the eternal Thou, in every sphere according to its manner.

(IT 57)

The thought, here, perhaps, is of the (alleged) 'mystery' of the other, even the other with whom we are intimate (IT 89 et passim): the mystery of the other is a 'breath' of the mystery of the divine.

So much for the basic conception of the thou-relation. What now of the other side of the duality, the it-relation and the 'it-world' that it generates?

The it-relation

The 'sublime melancholy of our lot', writes Buber, is that 'every thou must become an it in our world'. This is because, in the life of work, entities must be treated as 'means' to given 'ends' and must, therefore, be transformed into 'object[s] among objects' (IT, 68).⁶ The means may be inanimate tools such as hammers and computers, but inevitably they include human beings: the CEO of the corporation cannot but regard his 'workforce' as a means to the production of cars, must regard them as, as we say, 'human resources' to be organised in deployed in the same kind of manner in which we organise and deploy 'natural resources'.

The it-world thus seems to be the world of resources available for manipulation, both human and non-human. The picture is complicated by the fact Buber seems to wish to make 'observing' central to the it-world. When the botanist assigns the tree to a species (IT, 57) or the child 'watches' its mother as opposed to 'calling' to her (EG 36), the intentional object of the experience is an it rather than a thou. This complicates the picture because using something as a tool or resource is very different from observing it—if one tries to observe one's keyboard as one types the typing will likely break down. The issue here concerns the relationship between the objects of scientific theory and everyday tools or resources: the latter seem to be objects not of 'observation' but rather of use. Buber's view, however, is that all objects of either kind ultimately exist for the 'project of "conquering" the world' (IT 91). Implicit here seems to be the view that natural science is ultimately a technological project, from which it would follow that, while 'observing' entities is different from 'using' them, science is ultimately directed towards use and is, therefore, a repository of resources too. To observe a plant and classify it as a member of a species is a prelude to using it to satisfy some human end.

Difficulties in *I and Thou*

The thou-it dichotomy seems to be an exclusive disjunction. The opening sentence of *I and Thou* is, to repeat: 'The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude'. In Buber's view, either one approaches entities, human and non-human alike, as intimately personal thous, or else one confronts them as resources available for the 'conquest' of the world, human and non-human alike. But this, many critics have pointed out, seems outrageous: even Buber's friend Franz Rosenzweig complained that 'in your setting up of the I-it you give the I-thou a cripple for an opponent'.⁷ Exactly what, however, is supposed to be wrong with the disjunction?

One problem is that not all observing of objects is observing them as actual or potential resources. The child, says Buber, either calls to his mother as a

'thou' or else 'looks at something on the mother as at any other object' (EG 37). Either one relates to someone as a person or else, in current jargon, one 'objectifies' them as a source of pleasure or displeasure. But there is no either-or here. I observe with delight the grace of the ballerina's dance: here, my relation is objectual rather than personal, but I have no desire to *use* the ballerina in any way. Buber attempts to respond to this problem in *I and Thou*. The artist, too, he says 'beholds' what confronts him as an it. But if he wishes to create great art, Buber suggests, the artist's 'aesthetic understanding should immerse itself and disappear in the truth of that relation which surpasses understanding and embraces what is understandable' (IT 91): the relation, that is, to the eternal Thou, to God. So great art, as well as my observing of the ballerina, is really a thou relation, a relation to the eternal Thou and the beauty of his creation. Since this reduces all great art to religious art—which seems oppressively false—Buber has another go at the same problem in *Between Man and Man*. Here he distinguishes between the 'observer', the 'onlooker', and the one who is 'aware'. The observer approaches an object, a person or thing, with calculative intent: they note the traits of the entity for future use. The onlooker, by contrast, 'gives his memory no tasks' and simply allows the object to present itself in its own way. One might think of the flâneur ambling along the Champs-Élysées, enjoying the evening scene. The one who is aware, by contrast, 'meets a man about whom there is something which I cannot grasp in any objective way at all', something which 'says something *to me*, addresses something to me, speaks something that enters my own life'. The one who is aware stands in a thou relation to the person encountered. Given this trichotomy, Buber now assigns artists no longer to the third category but rather to the second: 'all great artists have been onlookers' (MM 9–10). While this, too, seems an overstatement, it might be regarded as true of some artists—impressionists, for example. The important point, however, is that the admission of 'onlooking' is the admission that not all 'it relations' have anything to do with 'conquering the world', that not all it-relations reduce entities to resources.

As Rosenzweig suggests, then, there is a great deal more to the 'it-world' than resources. The idea that if entities fail to show up as thous, they must show up as resources is mistaken. In his 'Replies to my Critics', written towards the end of his life, Buber suggests that the 'twofold' distinction between the thou-world and the it-world—the it-world in the sense of the world of resources—was never intended to be a distinction between 'exhaustive alternatives'. The alternatives, he says, represent 'primal' attitudes, but human beings also inhabit numerous non-primal attitudes (B 691). This, certainly, is what Buber should be saying. But it is not really what he did say. In 'Dialogue' in *Between Man and Man*, written six years after *I and Thou*, he still says that

For man the existent is *either* face-to-face [a thou] *or* passive object. The essence of man arises from this twofold relation to the existent ... The child that calls to his

mother and the child that watches his mother—or to give a more exact example, the child that silently speaks to his mother through nothing other than looking into her eyes and the same child that looks at something on the mother as at any other object—show the twofoldness in which man stands and remains standing.

(EG 36; my emphases)

The second problem with the thou-it disjunction is the idea of addressing a tree as a ‘thou’. The problem is not that it is impossible to be in some sense intimate with a tree—although given that persons have souls, it is hard to see how this could, as claimed, not be encountering ‘the soul of a tree’ (IT 59)—but rather that there is much more to the I-thou relation than the use of the thou. As we shall see, the essence of that relation is said to be ‘dialogue’. But even Buber does not think one can have a ‘dialogue’ with a tree. One might address a tree in the vocative case—‘O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum, wie treu sind deine Blätter ... (O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, how faithful are your leaves...)’—but it cannot answer back. Buber himself (as reluctant as Heidegger to accept criticism) eventually admits that ‘he would not deny the I-thou relationship with nature but neither would he use the same terminology for the relationship between person and person and that between man and nature’.⁸ The claim, in other words, is that there are two forms of the I-thou relation, the personal and non-personal. The idea of a non-personal thou, however, seems incomprehensible. And Buber himself seems to recognise this in other places: of necessity, he says, we ‘anthropomorphise’ God, for only thus can we address ‘him’ with the thou of prayer (EG 9).

What, then, is left of the ‘twofoldness’ between the thou-world and the it-world? Taking the it-world as the world of resources, what is left is a diagnosis of one of the central pathologies of modernity as the reduction of everything, human and non-human alike, to resource. It is worth noting that 1923, the year in which *I and Thou* appeared, is also the year in which Georg Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness* (GTC II chap. 1) appeared, the work that made ‘reification’—the transformation of everything into ‘things (*res*)’, i.e., into its—one of Western Marxism’s central tools for diagnosing the ills of capitalist society. Although Buber’s remedy for those ills is, we shall see, quite unlike that of Marxism—which he loathed—there is some overlap between his diagnosis of the ills and that of the Marxists.

Dialogue

In the Foreword to *Between Man and Man*, Buber says that its first essay, the 1929 ‘Dialogue’, ‘seeks to clarify the “dialogical” principle present in *I and Thou*’. Although there is obviously a relationship between dialogue and the thou-relation, ‘dialogue’ appears only three times in *I and Thou*, twice in reference to God (IT 133, 143) and once in reference to oneself (IT 52)—with

whom, Buber later decides, one cannot have a proper dialogue. Really, the theory of dialogue—the heart of Buber’s mature thought—is new thinking, not even implicit in a thou-relation that can obtain between oneself and a tree. What, then, is ‘dialogue’?

Paradigmatically, says Buber, dialogue occurs in the ‘interhuman’, in the communicative space generated by an ‘encounter’ between two human beings. Although dialogue does not demand language—two strangers exchanging a glance on a tram, the smile of the chimney sweep or of the old newspaper vendor are dialogical in character—paradigmatically, dialogue consists in a ‘conversation’ between two people, the ‘meaning’ or product of which exists ‘between’ them—is, as it were, a mutual achievement (KM 72–5).

Of course, not just any linguistic encounter is a dialogue. Although one always seeks to ‘influence’ the other, dialogue dies if one seeks to ‘impose’ an opinion by either ‘speechifying’, ‘scintillating’ (one of the accusations against the French intellectual milieu is that it is more important to be brilliant than to be right), clever ‘debating’, or resorting to manipulative ‘propaganda’. Crucially, one must not present a ‘semblance’ of oneself: (unlike the carefully curated self-image one presents on Facebook), the self that one brings to dialogue must be one’s authentic self, indeed one’s ‘whole’ self: one must ‘keep nothing back’, which means that ‘mutual unreserve’ is essential to ‘genuine’ dialogue (KM 75–88).

So much for the negative conditions of dialogue, what now of the positive ones? In genuine dialogue, says Buber, even when the participants struggle against each other, they nonetheless ‘affirm’ each other: affirm them, not as belonging to an abstract type (a fellow member of parliament), but in their totality and uniqueness. One affirms the ‘dynamic centre’, the ‘entelechy’ (KM 84–5), that makes the other the unique person they are. This cannot be done by observation (as soon as I notice the fragment of food attached to the other’s beard, the dialogical rapport is broken) but—here Buber expands on *I and Thou*’s notion of ‘presence’ (pp. 143–4 above)—only by imaginatively making the other fully ‘present’ (KM 70, 78–81).

Imaginatively making the other present sounds like ‘empathy’, but ‘empathy’ is a term Buber rejects. Instead he prefers ‘inclusion’, a term which, unlike ‘empathy’, as he understands the term, does not exclude one’s own ‘concreteness’.⁹ Rather, it is a relation towards one’s dialogical partner in which, with respect, perhaps, to some commonly experienced event, one actively casts oneself into the other’s point of view *without* abandoning one’s own. Inclusion, in a nutshell, is casting oneself into the ‘shoes’ of the other *without* abandoning one’s own shoes. Buber does not make this explicit, but it seems to me that, as in the famous duck–rabbit diagram, one cannot see both duck and rabbit at the same time, so one must oscillate between the other’s point of view and one’s own. One must ‘transpose’ oneself ‘over there’ but then return with, perhaps one’s own point of view modified as a result of the experience (MM 114–16).

Although Buber was rather scornful of his teachers in Berlin, this is essentially Dilthey's account of the 'higher' understanding of another person (pp. 25–6 above), save that it is applied to 'dialogue' with a contemporary rather than with an historical figure.

There are, says Buber, three 'chief forms' of the dialogical relation. The first 'rests on an abstract but mutual experience of inclusion'. Two people, for instance, different in 'nature and outlook', may fail to reach agreement. Yet each respects and 'acknowledges' the legitimacy of the other together with their authenticity in the dialogical situation—the 'truth', not of their views, but of their 'existence' (MM 117). Buber calls this an 'abstract' form of dialogue because the participants relate to each other only as 'spiritual-intellectual' beings, leaving out of account the 'full reality of [their] being and life'. The other two forms, by contrast, include this full reality.

The second form of dialogue is, *inter alia*, the ideal relation between teacher and pupil. Here, while there is a concrete experience of inclusion, it is one-sided. The good teacher in attempting to influence the pupil constantly feels from 'over there' the acceptance or rejection of what is offered. The student, however, cannot transpose him or herself into the mentality of the teacher.

That Buber distinguishes this second form—a form that allows that dialogue can occur between those who are cognitively unequal—is crucial to the plausibility of his general account because it allows not merely for educational 'dialogue', but also for his claim that there can be dialogue between God and man, man and 'machine' (MM 43), artist and public (EG 36), and therapist and patient. This is the central point that emerges in the 'Dialogue between Buber and Carl R. Rogers'. While Rogers admires Buber's notion of dialogue, he does not fully understand it, since he keeps insisting that, since he bases his therapeutic practice on Buber's notion, he stands in a relation of equality to his patients. Buber responds by agreeing that therapy is a form of 'dialogic existence', but then makes the obvious point that the patient cannot, and is not generally interested in, entering into the mentality of the therapist (KM 169–73).

The final, highest, form of dialogue is that which occurs between human beings who are, at least for a moment, intimate with one another: 'the concrete and mutual experience of inclusion ... the true inclusion of one another by human souls' (MM 117–19).

The importance of dialogue

Why is dialogue important? Buber himself explicitly identifies only two reasons: 'affirmation' and 'self-realisation'. But, of course, particularly given Buber's commitment to promoting peace between Jews and Arabs, a key aspect of dialogue is conflict resolution. What, we shall want to know, are Buber's views on conflict resolution? First, however, 'affirmation'.

Affirmation. In authentic mutual dialogue each participant, we have seen, 'affirms' the other as the unique human being they are. But what, exactly, is

affirmation? Buber explains the concept largely by saying what it is not. First of all, affirmation is not altruism. There are people passionately engaged in good works 'who have never spoken from being to being with a fellow man' (MM 23). And neither, contra the earlier view of *I and Thou* (p. 144 above), is it love. While one can in principle have (some form of) dialogue with anyone, 'I know of no one', says Buber (contra Fromm [p. 223 below]), 'who has succeeded in loving every man he met', not even Jesus: while he loved those who sinned against the law, he had no love for the upholders of the laws (Herod and the Pharisees, presumably) (MM 24). Finally, affirmation 'does not mean approval; but no matter in what I am against the other, by accepting him as my partner in genuine dialogue I have affirmed him as a person' (KM 85).¹⁰ This means, I suggest, accepting the other's inclusion in the 'team' of persons, with the rights that accrue to members of that team: the 'essential principle', says Buber, is Kant's injunction to never to treat one's fellow man as a 'means' but always as an 'independent end' (KM 85).

Affirmation, clearly, is closely related to Hegel's and Honneth's notion of 'recognition' (chap. 8 below). But it is not identical. For while Hegel and Honneth take the need for recognition to be a basic human need (pp. 229, 233 below), Buber does not. Rather, it is grounded in the even more basic need to escape from solitude. Unlike the animal, 'man as man' is

sent forth from the natural domain of species into the hazard of the solitary category, surrounded by the air of a chaos which comes into being with him, secretly and bashfully he watches for a Yes which allows him to be and which can come to him only from one human being to another.

(KM 71)

Acceptance into the 'team' of human beings is a human need on account of the more basic need to escape from solitude. There is a hint, here, of the nasty, brutish shortness of the Hobbesian 'state of nature': strength and survival depend on the tribe and so one wants to be accepted as a member.

Self-Realisation. Self-realisation, 'becoming a self', can only be fully achieved in the 'interhuman', in dialogue (KM 85). Why so? Why can it not be achieved 'monologically'? The answer turns on Buber's conception of the self as a mixture of the uniquely individual and the 'world-historical' (MM 98). Everyone, we have seen, has an individual, unique 'entelechy' (p. 149 above). Self-realisation is not, however, to be thought of in terms of entelechies alone. Rather, the 'height' of self-realisation is giving one's 'personal stamp' to the 'meaning of human existence' (KM 84–5). In other language, as we have seen, freedom, the freedom that consists in becoming a self (pp. 142–3 above), is a matter of fulfilling human 'destiny' in one's own personal way. Why can this not be achieved monologically? Contra the 'modern' theory which thinks of education simply as providing, so to speak, the fertile soil in which the individual entelechy blossoms, one's destiny, as refracted through local conditions, must be taught in the dialogue of sensitive teaching (p. 150 above). Education, in other words, is 'education of character':

not 'character' in the sense of personal temperament—that is the product of one's individual entelechy—but rather character in the sense of ethical character (MM 128–9). This is a very traditional (and valid) German idea, the idea of *Bildung*, education to character through, above all, the humanities. Only through *Bildung*, incorporation into communal 'destiny', can one achieve the 'freedom' of being a meaningful self, the freedom of being something other than a reed blown hither and thither by the fluctuating winds of desire: 'Free is the man that wills without caprice' (IT 108).

Conflict Resolution. Can dialogue resolve *radical* conflict, conflict between those who acknowledge no final principles in common, whose ultimate commitments are to incompatible 'worldviews'? Buber answers by way of anecdote. A Jew (himself) and a Christian are arguing, each as 'obstinate' as the other. At a certain point, conversation suddenly stops: they look into the 'heart of one another's eyes' and embrace. There is nothing 'mystical' about this 'immortal moment', says Buber. Rather, it is based on the fact that there is a great deal more to human nature than 'opinions': the fact that, unless one is crippled by ideology, one has deep bonds with people whose opinions one rejects, finds repugnant even. If we respond with our 'whole' being to the other's 'whole' being, we will accept 'his humanly unavoidable partiality' as the 'destiny of our conditioned nature' (MM 4–9) (accept the 'plurality' that, as Arendt notes, is part of the human condition [GTC I 190]).

This discussion reveals something important about Buber's notion of the 'completion' of a dialogue: it consists not necessarily in 'agreement', but rather in *connection*, in the kind of connection that excludes enmity and hence can found a 'steadfast world of peace' (MM 6). In his 'Autobiographical Fragment', Buber recalls an experience in which he touched the trunk of an oak tree with his walking stick and, through the contact, experienced the 'being' of the tree. This, he says, was when his notion of dialogue first came to him: 'the speech of man is like the stick whenever it is genuine speech' (B 22). 'Only connect' is the theme of *A Passage to India*, E. M. Forster's examination of the British Raj and of the troubled relations between Moslems and Hindus, British and Indians. If one can only connect, if one can only overcome the otherness of the other and recognise one's common humanity, peace will prevail. This, too, seems to be the foundation of Buber's binational Zionism. Jews and Arabs both have 'just' claims to the land of Israel. There is no intellectual resolution to the conflicting claims, but each can recognise the humanity of the other and be moved to care for the interests of the other along with their own.

Buber and Habermas. Buber's notion of the 'interhuman', of 'dialogue', and his rejection of 'monological' conceptions of the way in which one becomes fully human, anticipates in significant respects Jürgen Habermas' own attack on 'monological' thought, as well as his conception of 'discourse' or 'dialogical' ethics. Habermas recognised this by delivering a talk entitled 'A Philosophy of Dialogue'¹¹ in Jerusalem in 2012, a work devoted to honouring Buber's dialogical thinking. But how similar are the two notions of dialogue really?

Dialogue, as Habermas conceives it, aims at 'communicative rationality'. It achieves this to the extent that it approaches the 'ideal speech situation': a situation in which the participants treat each other as epistemic equals, avoid all non-rational modes of influence (bribery, threats, charisma, body language, rhetoric, poetry, propaganda), offer good reasons for their claims, and follow the laws of formal and informal logic, with the result that the 'consensus' that terminates the discourse is produced solely by 'the force of the best argument' (GTC I 47–51). Rationality is thus the essence of Habermasian dialogue, dialogue that, when it concerns the harmonisation of human interests, is an exercise in 'discourse ethics'. Buber, however, hardly mentions reason: about the only relevant remark is that a 'statesman or businessman' who stands in a thou relation to his community, 'while he serves a truth which is supra-rational does not disown reason but holds it in its [the 'truth's'] lap' (IT 98). The 'truth' he has in mind here seems to be ethical truth (which, as we shall see, cannot be separated from religious truth). This seems to say that reason has a role in determining the means to ethical ends—and perhaps in applying general ethical truths to particular situations (see pp. 159–60 below)—but that is all. Here, then, is one major difference between the Habermasian and Buberian conceptions of dialogue: while reason exhausts the former conception, it plays at best a minor role in the latter.

Reason is formal. So, too, therefore, is Habermasian dialogue. Participants in Habermas' ideal speech situation do not need to be intimate with, or even know, each other. And so, typically (if they are German), they will address each other with the formal rather than intimate version of the second person: Habermasian dialogue will typically be couched in the form of the *ich-Sie* relation which, as noted, Buber never discusses. It is on account of its formal character that Habermas thinks of discourse ethics as central to resolving differences between different groups within the modern, multicultural state. Paradigmatically, by contrast, Buber's dialogical partners are, or become, intimate with each other. Their dialogue is couched in the form of the *ich-Du* relation.

A second difference is that while Habermasian dialogue engages only one of the human attributes, reason, Buberian dialogue, as Buber frequently emphasises, engages the 'whole person'. This is why, while Habermasian dialogue cannot occur without language, Buberian dialogue can: as we have seen, the wordless exchange of glances, body language in general, can be 'dialogue'. All these differences will be important to the assessment of Buber's remedy for the pathologies of modernity, to which I now turn.

Section II: Social and political thought

The re-establishment of community

Modern human beings, we have seen, suffer from lack of freedom, lack of community, lack of meaning, and lack of at-homeness in the world. This is because

we live in an atomised and dehumanised it-world, a world of resources. The remedy is the re-establishment of a thou-world. What does this entail? Buber addresses this question in *Paths in Utopia*, which appeared in 1945.

Buber calls himself a 'socialist', a 'utopian' socialist. He adopts 'utopian', a term used pejoratively by Marxists, as a badge of honour in order to distinguish his kind of socialism from that of the Marxists, which he rejects absolutely. He rejects, in particular, three elements of Marxism. First, 'collectivism', the reduction of individuals to sheep-like 'serfdom', a reduction to which modern individuals only too readily submit in a flight from personhood and responsibility (MM 94 et passim)—in, in Fromm's language, a 'flight from freedom' (pp. 202–3 below). Second, he rejects violent revolution. As with the French Revolution, he claims, violent revolution is inevitably followed by a regime of terror (PU 51). Third, Buber rejects the location of utopia at some far distant point in the future—Engels' conception of a 'withering away of the state' at the 'end of history'. In a certain sense, Buber's project is that of establishing utopia *now*—which is why his book is called 'Paths in', not 'Paths to', utopia. As we shall see, the best model of 'utopia now' is an already existent entity: the Israeli kibbutz.

The aim of Buber's political life and thought is the re-creation of society as a 'community of communities', that is, a 'nation' (PU 136). As Henry Near observes, Buber's views as to how this is to be achieved are essentially identical with those of his friend Gustav Landauer (N 36), and so, in what follows, I shall not always distinguish between Landauer's views and Buber's.

Landauer is the source of Buber's thesis that the overcoming of the 'decentralistic social principle' by the 'centralist political principle' was the principal result of the birth of the modern state, and that the way forward consists in its reversal (p. 142 above). The way to overcome the centralised state, argues Landauer, is to make use of social groupings that still exist 'outside' and 'alongside' the state. In general, this is not a matter of creating new groups but rather of reviving existing forms of community. It would be madness, Landauer holds, to abolish the forms of community that are still left to us—marriage and the family, for example:

We need *form*, not formlessness [writes Landauer]. We need tradition. He who builds, not arbitrarily and fruitlessly ... acts from an inner kinship with age-old tradition.

(PU 48–9)

Hence, comments Buber, we do not need a new name for that which remains when the 'politicization' of the centralising state has disappeared: it is simply the 'people' (*Volk*), something that comprehends the 'innermost reality of nationhood' (PU 48–9). (I take it that *Volk* and *Nation* are not synonyms because, as with the Jews prior to the founding of Israel, a 'people' can exist without

a territorial base. A 'nation', it seems, is a people that has found its land.) Here Landauer and Buber discover the 'true' connection between nation and socialism:

Socialism, freedom, and justice can only be accomplished between those who have always been united; socialism cannot be established in the abstract, but only in a concrete multiplicity that is one with the harmony of the peoples ... the closeness of people to one another in mode of life, language, tradition, memories of a common fate ... nothing but the rebirth of all peoples out of the spirit of regional community can bring salvation

(PU 49)

Like Walt Whitman, observes Buber, Landauer is a conservative revolutionary: he unites the 'conservative and revolutionary spirits' (PU 50). This does not mean that he wishes to recreate the past exactly as it was. The time of the agora was the time at which humanity was at its happiest (Hegel calls ancient Greece 'the happy state'), but that era is gone and lost forever. The watchword is therefore not 'bringing back' but rather 'rebirth' (PU 136). 'Regional community', Buber continues, is understood by Landauer in a quite concrete way on the model of the pre-modern village. The communities that are to become 'cells of regeneration', cells of resistance to the centralised state, must satisfy three conditions: land must be made available as communal property, it must be worked, and all this must be done in 'the true spirit of community' (PU 53).

The 'true spirit of community' is a community's 'single living centre' (IT 94). 'The real beginning of a community is when its members have a common relation to the centre overriding all other relations'. And, as we shall see, that centre must be 'transcendental to the light of something divine' (PU 135). This common spirit is *sui generis*, not at all a 'superstructure' produced by underlying material conditions. (The fact that 'culture' so often acts independently of, and frequently against, interest in modern 'identity politics' shows how cautious one must be with the insight contained in Marx's superstructure thesis.) The co-operative associations of the nineteenth century constituted, as it were, the 'matter' of community but not the unifying 'form', which is why many of them failed. Landauer's leading example of the spirit of community comes from the Middle Ages. What united all the guilds, trade confraternities, city leagues, monasteries, and churches, what formed them all into a 'society of societies', was not the feudal social structure but rather the 'spirit', the ethos, of Christianity. It is only within such a spirit of mutual solidarity that socialism can be established: socialism, say Landauer, is 'the attempt to lead man's common life to a bond of common spirit in freedom, that is, to religion' (PU 53–5).

There is, Buber agrees with Landauer, no possibility of a communal spirit without communal land, without a location within which communal life and work comes into being. Yet, unlike Christianity, communal spirit does not need

to be 'founded (*gestiftet*)': it can simply grow out of living together: the city's god, writes Buber, can be 'nameless' (the Romans had an altar dedicated 'to an unknown god'). The 'struggle for socialism' is thus the 'struggle for the soil' (PU 135). Continuing the thought of Proudhon and Kropotkin, Landauer's and Buber's vision of the initial stage of socialism is thus not Marxism's socialism for the many, but rather 'socialism for the few', a 'socialist village' with workshops and factories, fields, and gardens (PU 55–6).

How is the 'village commune' to become more than 'socialism for the few'? Through voluntary federation between autonomous communes (PU 141). This will be necessary anyway because of the smallness of the groups (PU 74) (inter alia, to prevent boredom and inbreeding). The same principle of solidarity and mutual help that operates within a commune is to operate between them. The nation, as we saw, is to become a *communitas communitatum*, community of communities (PU 146–8).

Is this not all 'utopian' in the bad sense? Buber admits that almost all of the nineteenth century efforts at communal living failed, failed indeed rather quickly, the secular ones faster than the religious. (The Amish and the Mennonites, of course, still survive in North America.) Some of them, particularly the new world colonies (one thinks of Nietzsche's sister's effort to found an Aryan commune in Paraguay), failed because something deeper than mere 'community of sentiment' is needed to sustain genuine community (PU 72–3): genuine communities are such that 'one is either born into them or grown into them', and are such that their members understand their membership 'not as the result of a free agreement with others but as their destiny and as a vital tradition' (MM 186). Others, the nineteenth century consumer and producer co-operatives, failed because they degenerated into capitalist enterprises, again because communal living was missing, because the community of a single interest is not enough (PU 139–41). There is, however, one 'signal non-failure' (PU 142), the Israeli kibbutzim. The strength of the original ones (which first came into being in 1910 and expanded during the British Mandate) was that they owed their existence to the needs and stresses of the situation (a small number of Jews surrounded by hostile Arabs) rather than to 'ideology' alone (PU 142). Each kibbutz grew out of the needs and resources of the local situation and understood the validity of different forms in other locations. But there was ideology too, or, better expressed, an 'ideal': the original settlers read the utopian socialists and saw their new and more comprehensive form of the family as the prototypes of a new society. The idea and ideal of a national community formed the 'soul' of the movement, an ideal, however, that stimulated rather than dictated (PU 142–3).

Buber calls the kibbutz movement a 'non-failure' rather than 'success' because the *chaluziuth*, the original pioneering spirit, became diluted into a 'quasi-*chaluziuth*': the 'educative powers' of the pioneers were not sufficient to assimilate the 'very different human material' that began to arrive (especially from Hitler's Germany). At the same time, society at large began to pull away

from the ‘transforming influence of these focal cells’ and began to exert its corrosive influence on them. Nonetheless, the kibbutzim have not failed, and they remain our best hope for a revival of Western society, adequate to resist the threat of communism. For all their inadequacies, says Buber, the choice before us is between the two poles of socialism: Moscow and Jerusalem (PU 143–9)—which is something many of us who grew up in Europe in the 1960s indeed felt.

Difficulties in Buber’s communitarianism

In *Where Community Happens* (N), Henry Near, an immigrant to Israel who himself—unlike Buber—became a member of a kibbutz, raises a number of pointed, even hostile, objections to Buber’s conception of community and of the regeneration of society. The ones I shall consider are the following:

- (1) Buber has an inadequate account of internal relations within a community since they cannot all be reduced to dyadic, I-thou relations.
- (2) Many kibbutzim are secular rather than religious in character, a fact which conflicts with Buber’s claim that a genuine community must have a religious ‘centre’.
- (3) Rational decision-making is central to any kibbutz, but Buber hardly mentions reason, and when he does, he relegates it to the it-world.
- (4) Buber never mentions deliberative democracy, but this, too, is central to the life of the Kibbutz.
- (5) Collectivism, the abandonment of individual self-determination, at least in times of crisis, is a feature of many kibbutzim. And for many, the idea of finding meaning by becoming an ‘organ of the social organism’ is their reason for joining a kibbutz. But for Buber, self-realisation is paramount, with the result that he rejects all forms of collectivism.

Inadequacy of the I-thou relation. As Near says (N 33–7), Buber’s view seems to be that in a genuine community, everyone is on ‘thou’ terms with everyone else: ‘The structures of communal human life derive their life from the fullness of relational force [I-thou relationship] that permeates their members’ (IT 98). And so if there are members of the kibbutz who are not on I-thou terms, communal life is not properly realised: ‘Only men who are capable of truly saying “thou” to one another can truly say “we” to one another’ (MM 208). But inevitably, there must be such members. Personal chemistry makes it so. The I-thou relationship of course allows disagreement, even radical disapproval of another person, but underlying that there must be a bond of friendship (the kind of friendship that used to transcend the split between Republicans and Democrats but now, thanks to the confinement of people within social media silos, has almost gone).

What is required of relationships within a community between people who cannot say *Du* to one another from the ‘heart’ (IT 128)? The answer, surely, is

'affirmation' (pp. 150–1 above), respect for the non-intimate other that accords him or her the rights that come with membership of the community. What is required, in other words, is the *Sie*, with its respectful capital *S*, the formal rather than intimate second person singular. Yet, as noted, the *Sie* never appears in Buber's work.¹² (Habermas, in discussing Buber's conception of dialogue, glides over this fact by speaking not of the 'thou' but of the 'second person' [op. cit. passim]—as if, like Hebrew or modern English, German had only one version of the second person singular.)

Another reason Buber needs to attend to the *Sie* concerns the 'community of communities', the federation of communities that is to add up to a nation. As we saw, Buber's ideal is the agora, the direct democracy of the ancient world, and he has a correspondingly low opinion of representative democracy, which he regards as part of the state centralism he opposes. He does, however, admit that, in the modern world, representation is unavoidable. The agora has gone, so that relations between communities will require a 'system of representation' (PU 136–7). But representatives from different communes will not, in general, be intimates. And so the respectful formality of the *ich-Sie* relation will be essential to inter-communal relations. In sum, therefore, neither a community larger than the traditional family, nor a nation, can be constructed on the basis of I-thou relations alone.

A further reason Buber needs the *Sie* is the character of his Zionism. He believes (commendably), we saw, in a binational state of Israel (LB 560). As mentioned, he was one of the founders of the Ihud (unity) Party that advocated political parity and shared sovereignty between Jews and Arabs. Jews and Arabs, he believed, should develop the land of Israel together: the Jews do not wish to rule, only to live in peace (LB 523). Arab citizens should have the same rights and opportunities as Jews (LB 583). Furthermore, the idea of the Jews as a uniquely privileged 'chosen people' to whom alone God gifted the land is a misreading of Judaism: Psalm 82, for example, never singles out the Jews as a uniquely virtuous people because they themselves are divided into oppressors and the oppressed.¹³ Yet, of course, the two nations are two *nations* and hence, save for individual exceptions, lack the intimacy of the I-thou relation. The dialogue between them that would be necessary to joint sovereignty would have to be *ich-Sie* dialogue, Habermasian rather than Buberian in character.

Religion and the Commune. Many kibbutzim, Near observes, thrive without a religious foundation. But that is incompatible with (what Near takes to be) Buber's claim that community is incomplete without 'communion with a supernatural power' (N 48), his claim that the 'communal spirit' required of a genuine community must be religious in character.

Emile Durkheim defines religion as

a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them.¹⁴

Notice that this, as I shall call it, 'sociological' definition of religion makes no mention of a 'supernatural power', and is, in fact, compatible with metaphysical atheism. Atheists, too, can hold things sacred: for many Americans, the Constitution is a sacred text, a text 'set apart and forbidden', forbidden to be altered.

Buber, himself, we shall see, did believe in a (partially) supernatural power. And he notes, as we have seen, the historical fact that communes with such a grounding tend to last longer than those without (p. 156 above). But it is not clear that he regards that kind of religion, 'metaphysical religion', as one might call it, as essential to the kibbutz. The language of the remark that the 'centre' of a genuine community must be 'transcendental to the light of something divine' (p. 155 above) is notably vague, and the remark quoted earlier that the 'common spirit' of a genuine community is 'religion' (p. 155 above) is Landauer's rather than his own. Commenting on the remark, Buber notes that this is virtually the only passage in which Landauer, who avoids all avowals of religion, uses the word 'religion'. (Metaphysically speaking, Landauer was almost certainly an atheist.) He uses it, continues Buber, 'in the positive and binding sense ... to express the thing he craves: a bond of common spirit in freedom' (PU 55). Landauer, in other words, is making use of the etymology of 'religion', its derivation from the Latin *ligare*, 'to bind'. Despite, then, his own commitment to a transcendent deity, Buber seems to allow that it is only religion in the sociological sense that is required for the grounding of genuine community.

Reason and Dialogue. Does Buber fail to give adequate recognition to the role of reason in communal life? Near reports that after observing the way in which the round-table discussion occurred in the early days of Kibbutz Ginegar, the English scholar Dorothea Krook described the process of decision-making as a 'triumph of rationalism'. Buber, however, Near continues, describes human relationships within the community entirely in terms of 'spiritual attitudes'. The rational aspects of these relationships are hardly mentioned at all, and indeed seem to be relegated to 'the it district, necessary to the ordered conduct of life, but essentially irrelevant to interpersonal relationships'. And then Near quotes the remark I quoted earlier (p. 153 above) to the effect that the 'statesman or businessman who serves the spirit ... serves the truth which, though supra-rational, does not disown reason but holds it in her lap' (N 48–50).

As we saw, the essence of Buberian dialogue is emotional connection, as it is for E. M. Forster. When this occurs, enmity ceases, and the will to resolve conflicting interests comes into being. But the will to resolution is not the same as resolution: the question of how to accomplish resolution remains unanswered. For that, for the development of a mutually acceptable compromise, hard thinking is required, something along the lines of Habermas' communicative rationality. Near, then, is surely correct: Buber's conception of dialogue is impoverished by his failure to attend to the role of reason in determining, not

merely means, but also communal ends. Buber's conception of dialogue thus needs to be supplemented by Habermas' insights. On the other hand, Habermas' reduction of dialogue to something like an ideal philosophy seminar needs to be supplemented by the virtues of Buberian dialogue: unreservedness, lack of semblance, candour, the engagement of the 'whole' person.

Democracy. Buber, claims Near, is not a supporter of democracy: 'it is no accident that the term "democracy" does not appear in the index of any of the three books devoted to Buber's social and political thought' (N 50). This objection is simply mistaken. For as we have seen, the 'agora', the direct democracy of ancient Athens, constitutes Buber's political ideal—precisely the kind of democracy the smallness of the kibbutz makes possible within it. Buber, we have seen, while no admirer of representative democracy, accepts that it is necessary to dialogue between kibbutzim, that it will be necessary within a 'community of communities' (p. 158 above). It should also be noted that his binational version of Zionism is ultra-democratic.

Anti-Collectivism. Self-realisation, we have seen, is a central Buberian ideal. For many members of the kibbutzim, observes Near, self-realisation was a matter of, in Hegelian language, 'founding our function as an organ of the social organism'. This was the *chaluziuth* spirit of the early pioneers. Buber, however, continues Near, writes that 'it is impossible to tell men what way they should take Everyone should carefully observe what way his heart draws him to, and then choose this way with all his strength'.¹⁵ It seems, therefore, that for Buber, self-realisation is not merely 'realisation of oneself' but also 'realisation by oneself'. This, Near concludes, amounts to an individualism that is incompatible with community since a condition of genuine community is that one 'devotes all of his life to a cause' (N 53–5).

Buber addresses this issue in his discussion of Kierkegaard, the 'single one' who could not say 'thou' to his fellow human beings but only to God. Buber agrees with Kierkegaard that an authentic individual must be a 'single one' in the sense of not being a member of the 'crowd'—not being, in Nietzsche's language, a 'herd animal'. Unlike Kierkegaard, however, says Buber, the authentic person must 'put his arms around the vexatious world whose true name is creation'. What this entails is determined by one's 'historical' situation: 'the human person belongs, whether he wants to acknowledge it and take it seriously or not, to the community in which he is born or which he has happened to get into'—happens to get into and then 'grows' into and so becomes as if born there (p. 156 above). This commits him to realising its historical 'destiny'. Nonetheless, one must also realise that 'true membership of a community includes the experience ... of the *boundary* of that membership': 'For the man living in community, the ground of personal and essential decision is continually threatened by the fact of so-called collective decisions'. Political decision, says Buber, is typically understood—understood by, *inter alia*, Near—as joining a group so that 'from then on one has only to share the group's movements' and is restfully

relieved of all but a 'fragment of responsibility'. In fact, however, the group cannot relieve the individual of responsibility. In practice, moreover, the so-called collective decision is but one of a number of competing 'interpretations' of communal destiny, competing views of what constitutes the 'good of the community'. And so, even given that the thriving of the community is the meaning of one's life, one cannot authentically avoid making one's own decision. This does not mean that one must make that decision alone and unaided: the 'direction' of those at the head of one's group is seriously important—but the direction must not be substituted for the decision' (MM 76–80).

This seems to me entirely correct: to be committed to a cause, to be committed to—to borrow Heidegger's notorious phrase—its 'inner truth and greatness', is not to be committed to its dominant current interpretation. Near is probably right about some of the kibbutzim: that the kibbutzim generate 'group think' and lack of individual initiative has been a constant accusation. But had he thought more about his view, he would have seen that—since sub-'organs' of 'organisms' are not supposed to think—it would commit him to accepting Adolf Eichmann's defence that he was 'only following orders'.

Section III: Religion and ethics

Buber was, of course, a theist and a theologian: belief in the Abrahamic God permeates his thought. This section attempts an overview of his religious and ethical philosophy.

The nature of God

God, Buber is clear, is a 'being', indeed the 'absolute being', one that stands 'over and against' me (EG 11, 14, 21). Heideggerian hesitation, the crossing out of 'being' (p. 54 above), has no appeal for Buber, and neither does Tillich's 'God above God', the god who 'transcends [traditional] theism' (p. 128 above). God's existence, moreover, is entirely independent of human existence. One might say that for Buber, as for Spinoza, God is a 'substance', save that, according to Buber, the language of 'substance' obscures the 'dialogue between God and man', the thou-relation (EG 11–12) (see further, pp. 162–3 below).

Buber is not a pantheist. God and the world are, contra Spinoza, not identical: 'he who confines God within the immanent means something other than Him'. Pantheism, for Buber, is not a version of theism. On the other hand, 'he who refused to limit God to the transcendent has a fuller conception of Him than he who does so limit Him' (EG 21). And certainly, a gnostic such as Kierkegaard (MM 212) who makes God the wholly 'other' of the world has a false conception:

God, indeed, is not the cosmos, but far less is he Being *minus* the cosmos. He is not to be found by subtraction and not to be loved by reduction.

(MM 67)

God is then, in some sense, both transcendent and immanent. This might suggest that Buber is a panentheist (God is the world and more than the world, as a rose is a blossom and more than a blossom), and at one point he speaks of Aeschylus' statement that 'Zeus is all and what is more than all' as expressing a genuinely religious attitude (EG 21). On the other hand, however, he deploys the very traditional author-book image to describe God's relation to the world: the world, he suggests, is God's 'poem' (MM 17), a remark to which I am inclined to give more weight than to the line from Aeschylus, given that it is difficult to make sense of the idea of God as a 'being' that stands 'over and against one' if we and the world stand to God as parts to whole. Buber, I suggest, adheres to orthodox Judeo-Christian theology according to which God, the creator, stands to the world as poet to poem or potter to pot. His emphasis on God's immanence is motivated by a rejection of gnosticism (pp. 167–9 below), but it is an emphasis on, not the immanence of God, but rather of his 'voice' (MM 18): as the poet's personality and message to us is present in the poem, so God's message to us is present in the world. While not ontologically immanent, God, we might say, is epistemologically immanent: he is 'in dialogue' with us (p.163 below).

Religion and ethics

What, asks Buber, is the relation between the religious and the ethical? That he frames the question in terms of 'spheres' of existence (EG 86) shows that he is thinking about this question with—and against—Kierkegaard. Given that the ethical concerns one's relation to good and evil while the religious concerns one's relation to 'the Absolute', if there is a relation between the two spheres, it is not, observes Buber, a self-evident one.

The religious life is motivated by the feeling of dependence, 'creature-feeling'. We need God—contra Sartre, the 'religious need' cannot be extinguished (EG 55–6)—but also God needs us, needs us as 'helpers and companions'. This, to repeat, does not mean that God's *existence* is dependent on us: talk of 'the emerging God' (of Scheler's 'unfinished God' [GTC II 162]) is no more than 'presumptuous chatter' (IT 130). What it means, rather, is that God needs us for the perfection of the world he has created. Someone who understands this

offers his little will to God, and encounters him in a great will. "Let thy will be done"—is all he says, but [being in the] truth goes on to say for him: "through me whom you need".

(IT 131)

To submit one's 'little will' to God's will, to do that for which he needs one, is to act ethically: 'living religiousness wants to bring forth living ethos' (EG 86). But why should this be so? Why should living according to God's will coincide with the ethical life?

One answer, Kierkegaard's, is that, by definition, the good, or at least one's highest duty, is simply to do whatever—whatever—God commands. So, according to Kierkegaard, when Abraham hears God commanding him to prove his faith by sacrificing his beloved son Isaac, that Abraham is willing to follow the command and commit what conventional morality calls murder makes him, as Genesis indeed presents him, a great hero. Buber rejects this dreadful view. For all his reverence for the Old Testament—which, remember, he spent years translating into German—Buber makes the essential point: given that 'Moloch imitates the voice of God' (EG 103), Abraham has no justification for believing that it really is the voice of God he hears rather than a phantom of his own diseased imagination. The same issue occurs with respect to the Book of Samuel, in which Samuel delivers to Saul the message that his dynastic rule will be taken from him because he has spared the life of the conquered prince of the Amalekites. Arguing against textual fundamentalism, Buber asserts that 'Samuel has misunderstood God'. Given a choice between God and the Bible, one must choose God (B 31–2).

But if the good is not *defined* as God's will, why should we assume that what God wills is always good? Simply because the Abrahamic God is a morally perfect being. What follows from this is that we must use our 'pre-conscience' (EG 84), our innate capacity to know the difference between good and evil, in order to understand the will of God. This is why his view, says Buber, does not amount to a defence of 'moral heteronomy in opposition to moral autonomy' (EG 86). Since one must decide for oneself what the good—and hence the will of God—is, one remains epistemologically autonomous in submitting one's own will to the will of God. How, however, does one determine what the divine and ethical will wills? How does one determine what it wills in particular, concrete situations?

Ethical epistemology. One determines God's will, writes Buber, by reading 'the signs' (MM 12). Most of the time we are encased in an unconscious 'armour' designed to protect us against them (the armour of self-interest). But if we remove it, we will be able to read 'the speech of God' (MM 45). The signs are not signs of some grand, Kantian–Hegelian plan for the world: they are simply events in daily life, moments in which something speaks '*to me*' and demands a response (p. 147 above). They are, that is, the 'words' through which God speaks to me, 'words' that make possible the 'dialogue between God and man' (EG 12). In his earlier years, says Buber, he believed that the 'religious' consisted in moments of 'ecstasy and rapture' in which he encountered the 'other' of mundane life. There was no bond between the life beyond and the life here. (In effect, that is, the early Buber was a gnostic.) But having given up this false conception of the religious, he continues,

I possess nothing but the everyday, out of which I am never taken. The mystery ... has made its dwelling here where ... I know no fullness save for each mortal hour's fullness of claim and responsibility.

(MM 16)

Buber gives an anecdotal example of his own failure to read the signs during his earlier years. Following a morning of religious rapture, he was visited by a young man. He provided his visitor with an attentive and friendly conversation. But he failed to guess ‘the question the man did not put’. And later, the young man died (so it seems, by his own hand). Through failing to read the signs, Buber failed to see that in ‘despair’, the young man had come ‘not for a chat but for a decision’ (MM 16).

Buber’s self-confessed failure is a failure properly to read a conversation. But words are not necessary to provide a sign that calls for one’s response: ‘A dog has looked at you, you answer (*verantwortest*) for its glance, a child has clutched your hand, you answer for its touch’ (MM 20). This brings him very close to Emmanuel Levinas’ grounding of morality in the phenomenology of ‘the face’: the face that, ‘in its nudity and defencelessness signifies “do not kill me”’ and, more generally, ‘is a passive resistance to the desire that is my freedom’.¹⁶

Buber’s account of the virtuous life is a version of ‘situation ethics’, for he emphasises that responding to the signs, to the speech of God, is always a response to the ‘God of the moment, a moment-God (*Augenblicksgott*)’ (MM 17). Moral responsibility, he writes, needs to be

brought back from the province of specialised ethics, of an ought that swings free in the air, into that of lived life. Genuine responsibility (*Verantwortung*) exists only where there is a real responding (*Antworten*),

(MM 18)

a responding to the ‘concrete reality’ of the moment. ‘No knowledge and no technique, no system and no programme’ can help one respond appropriately to ‘what cannot be classified’, to ‘concretion itself’ (MM 18). (This is an expression of Buber’s ‘nominalism’ to which I shall return [pp. 166–7 below].)

Buber’s situation ethics has given rise to the accusation of ‘antinomianism’, of denying the existence of moral norms or principles. But this, we know already, he does not do. Ethical and religious ‘tradition’ (pp. 154–6 above) is essential to communal life. But although tradition gives us ‘something to apprehend’, he says, ‘it does not give us the apprehension’. Even when ‘the individual calls an absolute criterion handed down by religious tradition his own, it must be re-forged in the fire of his personal essential relation to the Absolute if it is to win true validity’ (EG 86). There are, in other words, moral laws corresponding to—determinant of—the will of God. But how, then, can it be that ‘no system’ can tell us what to do in a given situation? I think Buber’s view is essentially the view outlined in Hans–Georg Gadamer’s discussion of hermeneutics, in particular, his discussion of legal hermeneutics (GTC I chap. 7). For Buber, there are, of course, moral laws—at a minimum, surely, the Mosaic code—but their application in a given situation is something each actor has to sensitively decide in each case: decide, just as the U.S. Supreme Court has to decide on the meaning and

application of the eighteenth-century Constitution's 'right to bear arms' in the age of semi-automatic assault rifles. Religion gives us, to repeat, something to apprehend, but not the apprehending, not the application. In this respect, I think Buber's version of 'antinomianism' is exactly right.

The Authority of Ethics. The religious life, we have seen, is the ethical life. But what about the converse? Is the ethical life necessarily religious? Are atheists incapable of virtue?

Kant's obsessive and troubled relation with the idea of God, observes Buber, is motivated by the contradiction between the moral imperative, which is 'unconditional' ('categorical') and the 'conditional' nature of any 'immanent' justification (EG 12). One should do the right thing 'for its own sake', but if I do it because 'honesty pays' or because it makes me sleep better at night, I do not. In his old age, Kant decided that 'God is not an external substance but only a moral condition within us', a subjective sense of duty. But this fails to account for the categorical nature of moral obligation, because 'only an absolute can give the quality of absoluteness to an obligation' (EG 12). This comes directly from Kierkegaard: if I, as an ordinary empirical self, am the source of the authority of moral commands, they cannot have absolute authority because I can always cancel a previous command. And so my life, as Kierkegaard puts it, is always in a provisional, 'experimental' state and is a life that lacks true 'seriousness', absolute commitment.¹⁷ Only a source of authority external to the self can provide moral obligations with unconditional authority.

One might object that one's community can perform the same function as God. God's authority, after all, stems from his status as 'the father', as one's creator. One's love and respect for his will stems from one's 'creature-feeling' (p. 162 above). But, as Buber himself comes close to doing, one might argue that we are the 'creatures' of our community, and that the sacred command of communal ethos needs, therefore, no further validation. Buber would have to respond to this objection in terms of the moral universalism, which he clearly holds, though infrequently emphasises: since the moral laws are valid for all individuals and all communities (though their application in each situation may well be different), the authority responsible for the unconditional character of those laws must stem from a being that has authority over all human beings. Universal laws, Buber would say, require a universal God.

Religion and philosophy

What is the difference between religion and philosophy? In a word, according to Buber (EG 20–38), it consists in the fact that while

I-thou finds its highest intensity and transfiguration in religious reality in which the unlimited being becomes, as absolute person, my partner, I-it finds its highest concentration and illumination in philosophical knowledge.

(EG 37)

Whereas the religious stance to the world deals in the I-thou relation, the philosophical stance deals in the I-it relation, in the duality between 'subject' and 'object'. (Notice yet another appearance of the I-it relation that, with some exceptions, is not part of the project of 'conquering' the world.) The result is that while, within the religious attitude, God is a thou, he becomes 'an object from which all other objects must be derived' in all 'great philosophy'. What this means is that when philosophy becomes philosophy of religion, it mistakenly thinks of religion as founded on a subject cognising an object, in a 'noetic act' (EG 25). One might object that, as Buber indeed seems to say in the above quotation, a presupposition of taking oneself to encounter a thou is taking oneself to encounter an object—a 'being'—but Buber's point must be that 'lo, a being' does not belong to the content of the religious experience, even though, in a different moment, one would say 'Of course, God is a being'. In the I-thou relation, one encounters another being qua person, not qua object.

That religion deals in the I-thou and philosophy in the I-it reflects different attitudes to the world. While the religious person *lives*, engages in life, the philosopher disengages and reflects upon it. This reflects the different intentions that underlie the two activities. While the religious person searches for a 'Way', a 'meaning' that will make life 'unarbitrary' (EG 26),¹⁸ the philosopher seeks not a life meaning, but rather objective knowledge.

A further contrast between religion and philosophy is that while, as we have seen, the religious person is engaged with the 'world-concreta' (EG 35) that present themselves in the 'spontaneity of the moment', philosophy looks away from one's concrete situation in a 'primary act of abstraction'. In its search for the ground plan of the manifest world, it 'look[s] upward[s]' to the 'Platonic ideas'. When Malebranche says that 'we see things in God', and speaks as a philosopher, the 'things' in question are 'archetypes' or 'perfect essences', but when he speaks as a religious person, they are 'the actual exemplars, the being and objects with which ... he spends his life' (EG 33). This is why 'the central event of Christian philosophy', the scholastic dispute over the reality of universals [in the Middle Ages], was in essence a struggle between religion and philosophy'. For true philosophers, Platonic universals are real, for the religious person, they are merely names that gather unlike things together, which, while useful in practical life, can easily blind us to the reality of the situation (EG 32–3).

As the above makes clear, Buber is an anti-Platonist, in philosophical jargon, a 'nominalist'. Take hunger, for example. One thinks of it as common to both humans and the animals. But actually, claims Buber, 'no human quality' belongs to the 'general nature of living creatures': 'even man's hunger is not an animal's hunger' (MM 189). And a finer-grained approach will show that there are subtle differences between the way you are hungry and the way I am. Here, clearly, lies the foundation of his so-called 'antinomianism'. As the meaning of

the U.S. Constitution's right to 'bear arms' differs between the eighteenth century and the present, so the meaning of 'love your neighbour as yourself' differs from one concrete situation to another.

* * *

There are at least two peculiar features of the above attempt to distinguish between religion and philosophy. The first is that Buber himself is a philosopher, by common regard, moreover, an 'existential' philosopher, one who is by no means content to merely 'reflect' on life but wants, rather, to make a difference to how that life is lived. The second is that Buber knows perfectly well that there are Aristotelians as well as Platonists, philosophers who, as in Raphael's 'School of Athens' (p. 13 above), believe in the earth rather than the Platonic heaven. And so what he presents as 'philosophy' is actually, not, certainly, *bad* philosophy, but rather *non-existential* philosophy, philosophy that fails to make contact with our concrete existence. What, then, is the point of the whole philosophy-versus-religion discussion? Perhaps his real target is merely the application of objectifying philosophy to religion, the objectification of God into an it. Perhaps all he wishes to do is distinguish, with Pascal and, as we are about to see, Heidegger, 'the God of Abraham and Isaac', the God with whom one can be in prayerful dialogue, from 'the God of the philosophers', about whom one can only think (EG 52, pp. 169, 176 below).

Religion and pseudo-religion

Traditional, objectifying 'metaphysics' is, we have seen, incompatible with the genuinely religious attitude. And so are a number of 'pseudo-religious' phenomena against which genuine religion has always sought to protect itself: magic, gnosticism, and mysticism. A different kind of pseudo-religion is the product of the attempt by modern philosophers to 'save' religion, to fill the gap left by the 'death of God' (EG 27, 66, 108).

'Magic' is the most pseudo of pseudo-religions. The priest figure says 'I have power over the powers I conjure': he manipulates the divine as the technician his dynamo. In fake religions of this ilk—Buber mentions theosophy—though one celebrates rites, one does so without turning to the Thou: the I-it replaces the I-thou (EG 108–9). Prayer becomes the shopping list of the credulous.

Gnosticism holds that the world is the work of the devil. There are two 'primal gods', a lower one, related to matter, who created the world, and a higher, purely spiritual one who redeems the world (MM 221). To be a gnostic is to be 'homeless and solitary' in the world. Even if one believes in one's ultimate salvation, one remains homeless, because one's true home is in the

transcendent (MM 152). As we saw, Buber confesses to having been, in his youth, a gnostic:

In my earlier years “religious” was for me the exception... . From somewhere or other the firm crust of the everyday was pierced... . Religious experience was the experience of an otherness that did not fit into the context of life.

(MM 15)

And Kierkegaard, too, we have seen, was ‘conditioned by gnosticism’ (EG 212). Kierkegaard’s cancellation of his proposal of marriage to Regina almost as soon as it was made, his inability to sustain a thou relation with anyone except the ‘eternal Thou’, his hiding from the world behind his many pseudonyms, are all marks of his gnostic cast of mind (MM 60–7).

Buber has several objections to gnosticism. One concerns its political application. From a gnostic point of view, as a material being, the human being is infected with radical evil—a view that finds expression in the political thought of authoritarian theorists such as Carl Schmitt. Political theory, says Schmitt, must start from the premiss either that ‘man is radically good’ or that he is ‘radically evil’. Given his reactionary Catholic background, Schmitt chooses the latter, a choice he uses to justify Hitler’s authoritarian state (GTC II 165–6). Buber’s objection to Schmitt is that this is an obviously false anthropology: ‘man generally is not “radically” this or that’ (MM 86–91), is not radically anything—a view that is actually well supported, not only by common sense, but also by scientific research.¹⁹ His main objection, however, although he does not put it in this way, is that for any of the Abrahamic religions, gnosticism is a heresy, since it denies God’s creation of the world. We are God’s ‘creatures’ and so we ought to love them as he does: ‘the ethical ... means to help God by loving his creation in his creatures, by loving it towards him’ (MM 66).

Buber is routinely described as a ‘mystic and philosopher’, but in fact, in his maturity, he is an unrelenting critic of mysticism, both Eastern and Western. Mysticism is, he says, a ‘doctrine of immersion’. According to Buddhism, for example, ‘the [individual] self and what pertains to it are not to be found in truth and actuality’ (IT, 132–3). This is because, in the formula Buddhism takes over from the Upanishads, ‘this art thou (*tat tvam asi*)’: there is only one true being, the ‘universal self’, and, at the level of deep reality, one is it because there is nothing else. This, says Buber, is the ‘annihilation of the human person’ (KM 96): if Buddhism is true, human personhood is an illusion.

Buber concedes that he views Buddhism from a Western rather than Eastern point of view (KM 97). But with that qualification, his main objection is simply that ‘mysticism can never be ontically true’ (MM 58). Plurality, in Buber’s view—the *principium individuationis*, as Schopenhauer calls it—the plurality of individuals that is presupposed by (though not identical with) the I-thou relation, is ontologically ultimate. Thus the mystics’ (and Schopenhauer’s) claim

that plurality is a mere appearance is a delusion. Aldous Huxley's 'chemical holidays' (he was an early experimenter with LSD) are not, as he claims, pathways to deep, objective truth, but merely private fantasies (KM 99).

Another objection to mysticism is that it inclines one to world-denial, to gnosticism. There are, indeed, trance-like experiences in which one seems to experience a momentary unification with the One. But 'when one returns to [as it now seems] the wretchedness of daily turmoil, transfigured and exhausted ... is one not bound to feel that Being is split, with one part abandoned to hopelessness?' (IT, 134)—a remark clearly based on the religious enthusiasm of his youth. Sometimes Buber presents mysticism as, not so much producing, but rather produced by, gnosticism. Buddhism, he says, seeks the 'annulment of the world', and of the individual self, because it seeks the 'annulment of suffering' (IT, 141, 139)—the first of the Buddha's 'Four Noble Truths' is, 'Life is suffering'.

A final category of fake religions are the attempts by modern philosophers to 'fill the horizon that has been declared empty' by Nietzsche's declaration that 'God is dead', an utterance which Buber accepts as expressing the sociological truth that, in the modern age, 'man has become incapable of ... real encounters with real divine power and glory' (EG 9). Even more 'eloquently' than Nietzsche's proclamation, these attempts to fill the vacuum reveal the absence of the genuine God from modern consciousness. So, for example, Bergson's identification of God with the process of life makes the concept of God meaningless by removing it from the sphere in which 'evil and good, despair and hope ... dwell side by side' (EG 15–16). Bergson's God, in other words, is a 'God of the philosophers' and as such is, as philosophers of religion put it, 'religiously inadequate': it is not a God in whom one could seek solace for one's despair, not a God whom one's wrong-doing could offend, not a god with whom one could have a thou-relation. Again, Heidegger's talk of a possible return of 'God and the gods' (GTC I 240–2) shows that he thinks only in terms of a flutter of subjective images of God, a sign of his abandonment of the possibility of 'real encounters with the divine as such' (EG 16–18). Once again, we are presented with a religiously inadequate account of the divine, nothing more than a vague feeling for something greater than ourselves (but see 174–6 below).

Buber's critique of both magic and gnosticism seems to me entirely correct. His critique of Heidegger I shall attend to in the next section. I should like, however, to dwell for a moment on his critique of mysticism.

As Buber was aware, his rejection of all forms of mysticism is, *inter alia*, a rejection of the theology of his friend Paul Tillich: in describing the 'theonomous' person's relation to the divine as one of 'in-dwelling' and 'complete reunion', Tillich clearly advocates what Buber calls a 'doctrine of immersion'. However, in the light of the discussion in the previous chapter (pp. 127–30 above), we can now see, I believe, that Buber's rejection of mysticism in all its forms is somewhat overhasty.

Buber makes, to repeat, two claims: that our own individuality and hence separateness from the 'eternal Thou' is ontologically basic, and that mysticism really reduces to gnosticism. The first of these assertions is just that, a mere assertion, an assertion, moreover, contradicted not only by Eastern ontologies, but also by the experience of Western poets, music lovers, philosophers, and others. And the second assertion, at least in the case of Tillich, is clearly false: since Tillich's theology holds God to be immanent in the world as the divine venture, it is not another world in which one is 'immersed' but rather this one. The theonomous life is a way not of exiting the world, but rather of being fruitful and productive within it.

One of the traditional functions of religion—the function on some accounts—is to provide an 'answer' to the riddle of death. This, I suggested, is something achieved by Tillich's theology: since the theonomous life is immersed in God, it shares in his undying nature. In pointing towards an overcoming of anxiety about death, Tillich constructs a theology that is, in this important respect, 'religiously adequate'. What, however, has Buber to say by way of overcoming the ultimacy of death? As far as I can see, nothing at all. Like the Torah, he is silent on the topic—certainly he shows no enthusiasm for Stein's 'immortal soul'. One can say, therefore, that, in contrast to Tillich, when it comes to the question of death, there seems to be something 'religiously inadequate' about Buber's theology. I conclude, therefore, that he should have taken mysticism more seriously than he did, and should not have identified mysticism as such with the gnosticism of his youth.

Section IV: Buber's Heidegger critique

Given the involvement of many leading German philosophers with the Nazi Party, it is not a surprise that, after his enforced emigration to Palestine in 1938, Buber should have adopted a more critical stance to the German tradition that had nurtured him. His criticisms are always insightful, but also ungenerous, grounded in a predetermined (and of course entirely comprehensible) desire to reject. As David Novak says, the criticisms of German philosophers in 'What is Man?', the inaugural lecture Buber gave on his arrival in Jerusalem, are more than intellectual exercises: it is, says Novak, hard to avoid the sense that the lecture is an 'existential Jewish response' to German philosophers whose 'humanism was insufficient to answer, much less counter, the monstrosity that erupted in their homeland'.²⁰

Thus Spinoza (not German, yet woven into the German tradition), for all his many virtues, in turning God into an (infinitely aspected) substance, misses the 'dialogical relation' between God and ourselves (p. 161 above); Kant reduces God to a subjective feeling, thereby undermining the authority of his own moral imperative (p. 165 above); Hegel's evolving God is a bloodless intellectual construction devoid of 'existential reality' (EG 13); Kierkegaard is a

world-hating gnostic²¹; Nietzsche, the prophet of the ‘will to power’, is a eugenicist who wants to breed a conscienceless, all-powerful ‘superman’ (MM 184) (the Nazi reading of Nietzsche that Buber must have known to be a parody); Carl Schmitt is another Nazi who believes in the ‘will to power’; Spengler is a proto-Nazi who reduced human beings to ‘beasts of prey’ (Buber suppresses the fact that the partially Jewish Spengler despised both racism and the Nazis, and that this remark occurs only in a late and minor work that is inconsistent with his magnum opus, *The Decline of the West* [GTC II chap. 4]), and so on. All in all, then, as Buber sees it, the German philosophical tradition is a sorry affair. The nadir of the tradition, however, is represented by yet another Nazi, Martin Heidegger, who is the main target in Buber’s critique of the German tradition. With 64 references to Heidegger in *Eclipse of God* and 80 in *Between Man and Man*, Heidegger, it is clear, is always at the front of Buber’s mind.

Buber and Heidegger knew and, at least in later life, respected each other. They met on the shore of Lake Constance the region of Heidegger’s birth, in the calmer times of 1957, and Heidegger sought, unsuccessfully, to arrange further meetings. In *Eclipse of God*, Buber states that ‘Heidegger ... undoubtedly belongs to the historical rank of philosophers in the proper sense’ (EG 58), deserves to be accounted one of major figures in the German tradition. After their meeting, Buber reported that ‘[w]e were able to laugh about ourselves, two elderly, contentious men, full of prejudices and resentment, less about our own than about the prejudices and resentment of our environment—here against the Jews, there against the Nazi Rector’.²² He adds parenthetically:

Many [in Israel] are offended that I mention [in my writings] in one and the same breath Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger. But since this meeting I know that [my critics] are insane or tasteless to have contested placing Heidegger on the same rung as these other thinkers.²³

Prior to their meeting, however, Buber was Heidegger’s severe critic. Two aspects of Heidegger’s philosophy are his particular targets: what we may call Heidegger’s ‘anthropology’ and his ‘theology’ (though Heidegger actually denied that he had either an anthropology or a theology).

Heidegger’s anthropology

Buber’s critique of Heidegger is set in the context of a history of philosophical attempts to answer the anthropological question, ‘what is man?’: what is this strange and worrying creature called ‘man’? Philosophy, being a matter of the intellect, has a built-in tendency to get the answer wrong by ignoring the ‘whole man’: so, for example, Hegelian ‘philosophy of history’ ignores the whole man by ignoring the natural man who lives ‘outside history in the unchanging rhythms of nature’ (MM 145) (an observation likely derived from Spengler’s

identification of unchanging peasant life as a timeless substrate untouched by the wheel of history [GTC II 111–15]). A major part of attending to the whole man is attending to the phenomena of ‘subjectivity’. A psychologist, to be true to his scientific discipline, must observe even himself as an ‘actor’, must observe human beings exclusively from a third-person point of view. But as with the novelist, a philosophical anthropologist, charged with comprehending the problematic nature of human existence, must attend to the interior perspective, the first-person point of view (MM 149). The underlying thought, here, is surely Dilthey’s distinction between ‘explanation’ and ‘understanding’ (pp. 15–28 above). While the psychologist, as a scientist, must stick to ‘explanation’, the philosophical anthropologist seeks to ‘understand’ human nature or, more exactly, ‘the human condition’ (MM 237).

Philosophy that gives primacy to subjectivity, however, arises only in certain historical epochs. Aristotle, secure in his intimate, closed, geocentric cosmos, had no motive to study the human being from anything other than a detached, third-person viewpoint. The proper posing of the anthropological question (human existence becoming, as Heidegger puts it, an ‘issue’) occurs only in times of alienation and homelessness, only when we experience ourselves as the ‘unwanted child’ of the universe (MM 237): it requires ‘the solitary man’—Kierkegaardian man—to give the question its depth. (We shall see Jonas making the same point. Existentialism, he says, is the product of gnosticism, of homelessness [pp. 189–92 below].) The first person to properly pose the question was Augustine. In the collapsing world of the Roman Empire, Aristotle’s ‘round and unified world’ no longer answered to experience and gave way to the world-alienated spirit of gnosticism. Split between two worlds and ‘homeless’ in this one, the human being became a tormenting mystery, ‘uncanny’ (MM 151–2). (Buber knows, of course, that the sense of ourselves as ‘uncanny’ goes back to the Greeks: the chorus in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, his ‘Ode to Man’, begins: ‘There is much that is uncanny, but nothing / that surpasses man in his uncanniness ...’. Sophocles is, however, a playwright, not a philosopher. Buber’s claim must be that only in times of extreme and general cultural insecurity does the enigmatic nature of human existence capture the attention of philosophers.)

With the Middle Ages, Western humanity returned once again to the security of the geocentric, Aristotelean world, which is why, for Aquinas, no exploration of subjectivity is called for. But with Copernicus and the Renaissance, the walls of the medieval cosmos began to crumble. In Pascal, one finds someone even more solitary than Augustine, homeless because the wall-less universe of the heliocentric cosmos *cannot* be a house. But only in our own time has the anthropological question reached full ‘maturity’. Two factors have contributed to this: the decay of the old, organic social communities and the ‘golem’ of uncontrollable modern technology (p. 142 above). It is no accident, Buber continues, that the main works in philosophical anthropology began to appear in the aftermath of the trauma of

the First World War (experienced by Ernst Jünger as the convulsion of a single great machine that no one could control). Scheler was correct, says Buber, when he said that 'we are the first epoch in which man has become fully problematic to himself' (MM 215)—problematic, if Bertrand Russell is right, because we are no longer capable of happiness (p. 69 above). None of these works, however, succeeds in answering the anthropological question. Preeminent among the failures is Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

Why does *Being and Time* fail to provide a satisfactory answer to the anthropological question? Inauthenticity, for Heidegger, is subservience to the crowd ('the They' or 'the One'). Heidegger's authentic individual is, therefore, claims Buber, 'solitary'. He can communicate only with himself: 'Existenz' is monological rather than dialogical. Since this is the condition of modern humanity, there is no denying, Buber accepts, that a *certain* human type is accurately presented in *Being and Time*. It is, however, a pathological type, a type even more pathological than the Kierkegaardian type. The Kierkegaardian subject can at least say 'Thou' to God; the Heideggerian subject can say 'thou' to no one. Thus *Being and Time* attempts to derive 'the essence of man' from a 'nightmare' (MM 199), to elevate the pathological to the normal, a fundamental error.

Heidegger's mistake, like Kierkegaard's, is thinking that one's social environment is necessarily the inauthentic 'crowd'. What corresponds to the thou in relation to the social group is the 'we'. But, to repeat, only those who can say 'thou' can truly say 'we' (p. 157 above). As Heidegger's own mentor Husserl says, human beings are bound together in community, a fact that 'fundamentally contradicts' (MM 190) Heidegger's anthropology. There is, in other words, no dialogue in Heidegger, no I-thou relation and consequently no 'we'.

Buber belongs to a group of Heidegger's Jewish critics—inter alia, Strauss, Löwith, Stein, and Jonas—who, for obscure reasons, act as though *Being and Time* stops at the end of Division I, Section VI, and that Division II Section V, 'Temporality and Historicity', does not exist.²⁴ For it is in this section that Heidegger constructs his 'we'. To cut a long story short (for the long story, see GTC I 144–54), it is here that we learn that, in the full conception, authentic Dasein has returned from the 'existential solipsism' (BT, 188) into which it was plunged in confronting the solitude of death, to find its life-meaning in 'loyalty' to communal tradition. Self-realisation, we learn, is essentially 'communication' with others so as to realise the destiny 'of the community, of a people' (BT, 384). These words, as we have seen, could almost have been written by Buber himself—his Jewish nationalism closely mirrors the German communitarianism out of which it was born. As so often with Buber, one feels is that what really worries him is how close he, the Jewish nationalist, is to the 'Nazi Rector'.

And yet, there is a difference between the two, a difference pointed to by the fact that the *Du*, so important to Buber, appears not once in *Being and Time* (neither *Freundschaft* [friendship] nor *Liebe* [love] appears either). If, then,

Buber is right that there is an inseparable connection between 'we' and 'thou', it would seem that the 'community' *Being and Time* indeed speaks of is not a genuine community.

I have already criticised Buber's claim that communal relations can only be thou relations (pp. 157–8 above). But at least some forms of community really are such that all members are on thou terms with each other: families, intimate friends, and lovers, at least. And so if there really is no thou in Heidegger, then there indeed seems to be something missing, something cold and inhuman, about his thought.

But, in fact, there is a thou in Heidegger, if not explicit in the early philosophy of *Being and Time*, present, at least, in the middle period works such as the Rectoral Address of 1933 and the lectures on Hölderlin's *Germanien* and *Der Rhein* of 1934–5. Like Stein, greatly influenced by the image of life in the First World War trenches, Heidegger writes that 'above all, it is death and the readiness for sacrifice that creates the space of community out of which comradeship springs' (GA, 39 73). And in the Rectoral Address he writes that

True comradeship only arises under the pressure of a great common danger or from the ever-growing commitment to a clearly perceived common task; it has nothing to do with the effusive abandonment of psychological (*seelische*) inhibitions by individuals who have agreed to sleep, eat, and sing under one roof ...²⁵

—a description that probably refers to the German Youth Movement's taste for camping in the forests, but sounds strangely appropriate to the Buberian kibbutz. In other words, Heidegger's thou, the thou of comradeship, arises not out of Buber's 'face-to-face' encounters between souls (p. 147 above), but rather out of side-by-side commitment to a common cause.²⁶ It seems to me, however, that not having experienced the trenches for himself, Heidegger creates a false antithesis. At least in a shared confrontation with death, one does become, as Buber puts it, entirely 'unreserved' with each other, entirely open. Since pretence and defence are pointless in the face of death, a thou relation inevitably emerges. And I think that the same is true with respect to a passionate commitment to a common cause. The trust generated by such commitment also has the effect of making defence and pretence pointless. There is, then, I suggest, a thou in Heidegger, even though he himself is not properly aware of the fact. Contra Buber, the Heideggerian individual is not condemned to Kierkegaardian 'solitude'.

Heidegger's theology

Like Nietzsche, says Buber, Heidegger starts from the sociological truth that 'God is dead' (EG 58, MM 198). For Heidegger, as for Nietzsche, the death of God means the death of the 'self-subsisting suprasensual world', the death,

that is, of 'the highest ends, the foundation and principles of the existent, the ideals, as well as the suprasensual God and gods' (EG 16). The death of God means, for Heidegger, that the God of traditional theology together with the identification of ethical norms with the divine will is gone and lost forever. As with existentialists in general, claims Buber, Heidegger is tormented by the fact that the 'silence of the transcendent' coexists with the persistence of the 'religious need' (EG 54). But whereas Sartre (and Nietzsche in his positivist period) thinks that the religious need must be extinguished, and firmly proclaims his atheism (EG 53), Heidegger looks for a return of the divine. His hope is not that the old God can rise from the dead, but rather that 'the holy' will appear in a new form. The way for this rebirth of the divine is to be prepared by Heidegger's 'pure ontological thinking', his thinking about 'being' (EG 58) and 'truth' (EG 65).

What, however, asks Buber, does Heidegger mean by 'return of the holy'? That he speaks vaguely of a return of 'God and the gods' (EG 17) is not promising. For what that suggests, Buber believes (p. 169 above), is that Heidegger thinks of the return of the divine not as the return of encounters with a transcendent being and a transcendent moral truth, but rather as simply a matter of 'finding things holy'. This, says Buber, was Heidegger's mode of thinking about religion as he approached the fatal moment in 1933. Searching for 'the coming one', for something, anything, that could be regarded as holy, he found it in 'the sinister leading personality of the moment' and, in the infamous Rectoral Address, pronounced Hitler 'the present and future German reality and its law'. Lacking the transcendent moral truths of traditional religion, he had no defences against the seductions of the hour (EG 64–5).

This, it seems to me, is an accurate analysis of Heidegger's Hitler hagiography of 1933, of the Heidegger who said, 'look at his wonderful hands', as if to prove Hitler's 'divinity'. And, apropos 'pure ontological thinking', the Rectoral Address does call for 'spiritual leadership' of the nation by the universities, suitably reformed along Heideggerian lines.²⁷ In *Being and Time*, as I have argued elsewhere, Heidegger thought of 'the gods', not as supernatural beings, but rather as ethical exemplars, 'heroes' (BT 385) sanctified by 'heritage', communal tradition.²⁸ And so it was easy for him to think that, in Hitler, he had discovered a new 'hero' who would bind the community together. If, however, he had thought more calmly about communal tradition, about its foundation in, as he later realised, 'the divine in the world of the Greeks, in prophetic Judaism, in the preaching (*Predigt*) of Jesus' (PLT 182), it would have been clear to him that Hitler was a false idol. For, as Arendt observes, what twentieth-century totalitarianism did was to 'reverse ... the basic commandments of Western morality—"thou shalt not kill", in the case of Hitler's Germany, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour", in the case of Stalin's Russia'.²⁹ I conclude, then, that while Buber produces an insightful account of the psychology of what Heidegger called his 'error' of

1933, he does not produce a fatal objection to *Being and Time*'s conception of 'the gods' as moral exemplars.

A further point is that, apart from selective quotations from the 1946 'Letter on Humanism', Buber's account of Heidegger's theology terminates with his works of the early 1930s. In fact, however, Heidegger's unceasing thinking about the divine had another forty years in which to evolve in a direction that, in some respects, is sympathetic to Buber's theology. So, for instance, as Buber rejects 'the god of the philosophers' (p. 167 above), so, repeatedly, does the later Heidegger. For him, too, we need not the solution to a cosmological puzzle, but rather a god before whom one can 'fall on his knees in reverence ... play music ... dance'³⁰: a god, in other words, to whom one can say 'Thou'. This is something Buber perhaps realised at their meeting in 1957.³¹

Conclusion

Martin Buber is now largely forgotten. In Israel, as Habermas sadly observes, his 'humanistic vision' is a 'closed chapter'.³² But as Gabriel Marcel says, he is 'a great thinker' (B 41) with a range that covers virtually all of the traditional areas of philosophy. Alongside Arendt, he is, to my mind, probably the most gifted member of the German phenomenological tradition after Heidegger. The weaving together of autobiographical fragments and philosophical reflection also makes him the most 'existential' of existential philosophers: his thought springs, not from the Hegelian view from nowhere, but rather from his own spiritual, political, and personal experience. He speaks not only to, but also from, the difficult task of being human.

Notes

- 1 Forgotten by the general public, though not by feminist ethicists such as Nell Noddings. See Wallace (2003).
- 2 Young (2010) 387.
- 3 Since Buber of course regards human beings as, inter alia, 'spiritual' (IT 90), this must mean *purely* spiritual beings, beings that are not embodied, not, at least, in the familiar way. God, 'the eternal Thou', is the only member of this class mentioned in *I and Thou*.
- 4 The idea seems to me mistaken, for, without a sense of the subject of experience, without a 'this is you' arrow on their internal map of the world, they would not have been able to navigate their way around within it.
- 5 Quoted in the translator's footnote at IT 146.
- 6 Given that 'primitive peoples' had, like us, to work, this is again inconsistent with the idea that, having no concept of the 'I', they had no 'it' attitudes.
- 7 Quoted in the 'Martin Buber' entry in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- 8 Friedman (1991) 130, 378.
- 9 Buber thus rejects 'empathy' for the same reason as Dilthey (pp. 26), empathy as understood by, *inter alios*, Theodor Lipps (pp. 75–6).
- 10 In the dialogue with Rogers, Buber appears to backtrack on this. Accepting the other, he says, is 'accepting him just as he is'. But this does *not* mean 'I don't want you to change': it means rather accepting the other in his 'whole potentiality', accepting him in his actuality plus 'what he is meant to become' (KM 181–2). On this—epistemically problematic—view, while affirmation does not

entail approval of the current views or behaviour of the other; it does entail approval of the 'whole person', understood as a combination of actuality and potentiality.

- 11 In Mendes-Flohr (2015).
- 12 Buber comes closest to acknowledging the *ich-Sie* relation in his discussion of 'abstract' dialogues between people 'thoroughly different in nature and outlook', dialogues in which the participants connect not as 'whole men', but only as 'spiritual' beings (p. 150). His view, presumably, is that people who relate to each other in this manner alone must belong to different communities.
- 13 Buber (1953) 20–30.
- 14 Durkheim (1995) 44.
- 15 Buber (1950) 15.
- 16 Levinas (1969) 84. Levinas was a close reader of Buber: see B 133–50.
- 17 Young (2014) 32.
- 18 Notice that Buber's commitment to the idea of a 'Way' that makes life 'unarbitrary' is another reason the charge of 'antinomianism' is mistaken, for there cannot be a Way without there being general principles for the conduct of life.
- 19 See Miller (2014). The zebra on the front cover summarises the results of empirical research.
- 20 Novak (1985) 125–6.
- 21 En passant, Buber makes the perceptive observation that, for all his anti-Hegelianism, Kierkegaard still uses the 'Hegelian ladder' to construct his account of the exemplary life as ascension from the 'aesthetic' to the 'ethical' and thence to the 'religious' 'sphere of existence' (MM 163). For Hegel, world history is a *Bildungsroman*: for Kierkegaard, the 'knight of faith's' history is a *Bildungsroman*.
- 22 Heidegger joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and became Rector of Freiburg University, charged with bringing the university into line with Nazi ideology.
- 23 Quoted in Mendes-Flohr (2014) 2.
- 24 For Löwith, possibly the original source of this false belief, and for Jonas, see p. 191. For Strauss, see GTC II 209–11.
- 25 Wolin (1993) 26.
- 26 See Young (1997) 56.
- 27 Wolin (1993) 36–7.
- 28 Young (2002) 94–8.
- 29 Arendt (1971) 436.
- 30 Heidegger (1969) 26.
- 31 For a fuller account of Heidegger's 'theology', see Young (2002), Chapters 7 and 8.
- 32 Habermas (2015) 19–20.

6 Hans Jonas

Responsibility for the planet

Born in Mönchengladbach, close to the Dutch border, in 1903, Hans Jonas was the son of assimilated Jewish parents who remained nonetheless in contact with the Orthodox tradition. His father died in 1938, his mother was murdered in Auschwitz in 1942. He studied with Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg, where he joined a Zionist student organisation. Husserl's classes he found daunting, in part because Frau Husserl sat in on every class, her intimidating eye making sure that everyone was paying attention. Heidegger, he found spellbinding: he recalls in his memoirs that, though he sometimes lost the thread, 'what I never lost was the sense that this was incredibly important, even if I didn't understand it' (M 41–2). In 1921, he moved to Berlin where he became friends with another Heidegger student, Leo Strauss (who, he recalls, had been a fan of Mussolini until the latter turned antisemitic [M 161]), and with Günter Anders (Hannah Arendt's first husband). In 1924, he followed Heidegger to Marburg, where he studied with both him and with Heidegger's collaborator, the Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann (who coined the term 'demythologise'). Strangely, he seems not to have encountered Tillich who also arrived in Marburg in 1924. Jonas and Arendt were the only two non-Christians in Bultmann's New Testament seminar, and it was here that their lifelong friendship began. With Bultmann's and Heidegger's encouragement, Jonas began to study the Gnostic movement that flourished in the early Roman Empire, a study which eventually led to a doctorate on Gnosticism supervised by Heidegger. This developed into his first book, Part I of *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (*Gnosticism and the Spirit of Late Antiquity*), which appeared in 1934. Although I shall have something to say about Jonas' later view that 'Heidegger's thinking represents ... a sort of present day gnostic phenomenon' (M 66), I shall not discuss this work itself, which Jonas himself describes somewhat unenthusiastically as a 'journeyman's project' (M 65).

Unlike the many Jews who persuaded themselves that Hitler's antisemitism was merely rhetorical, Jonas knew immediately that Nazi Germany would be no place for Jews and left for London in 1933. Two years later, he arrived in British-controlled Palestine, where he found some work teaching at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Though a brilliant linguist, he found Hebrew

terribly difficult, recalling that the preparation of one lecture required an entire week—half a day to write the lecture, and the rest of the week to translate it into Hebrew (M 90). As soon as war broke out, Jonas volunteered for the British army and was deployed to Haifa as a member of an anti-aircraft battery. In 1944, he joined the recently formed Jewish Brigade and, attached to Montgomery's Eighth Army, took part in the Italian campaign. At the end of the war, he returned to Germany as a member of the British occupying force, having sworn he would never return save as a member of a victorious army. He visited Bultmann and Jaspers in the uniform of a British sergeant. He did not, however, visit Heidegger whom he never forgave for having thrown in his lot with the Nazis in 1933. Returning to Israel at the end of 1945, he once more had to struggle with teaching in Hebrew in Jerusalem. Three years later, he was drafted into the Israeli army and fought in the Arab–Israeli War of 1948.

Discharged from the Israeli army in the following year, Jonas moved to Canada, which is where he acquired his superb command of English (though, as YouTube confirms, he always spoke with a heavy German accent). He taught at McGill in Montreal and then at Carlton in Ottawa, making frequent visits to New York where he was reunited with Hannah Arendt, Günter Anders, and Karl Löwith, a somewhat older former student of Heidegger. In 1955, he found a permanent position at the New School for Social Research where he remained until his retirement in 1976. In 1963, he had a terrible row with Hannah Arendt over her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the book in which she deployed her (actually Jaspers' [p. 63 above]) fraught phrase 'banality of evil'. Shocked by her anti-Zionist tone, by her ignorance of Judaism, of the history of Jewish persecution, and of the fact that Eichmann was a—far from 'banal'—ideological antisemite (M 179–82), Jonas broke off all contact with Arendt for two years, the silence ending only when his wife Lore pushed him into a rapprochement. The old intimacy was resumed, but the offending topic was never again discussed.

The Phenomenon of Life, by Jonas' own account his first major work of philosophy (M 65), appeared in 1966, to be followed in 1974 by *Philosophical Essays*. In 1979, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilization* appeared, and under Jonas' close supervision, was translated into English in 1984 as *The Imperative of Responsibility*. It is on this work that I shall be principally focused.

Fame is fickle. While Leo Strauss (GTC II chap. 7) is famous—or infamous—in America but anonymous in Europe, Jonas, relatively anonymous in the United States, became, on account of the *Imperative of Responsibility*, a celebrated public intellectual in Germany. The book was an instant best-seller and was reprinted nine times during its first decade. According to Christian Schütze (one-time editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*), not since Fichte and Hegel had a work of philosophy so influenced public discourse. Partly this was because, by the end of the 1970s, Germans were waking up to the fact of the environmental

crisis, so that a book with the message that we must take responsibility for our future, lest there be no future, was instantly topical. Partly too, however, the book was popular because it was written by a Jew: Jonas' willingness, after four decades of writing in English, to return to German for his main work, was experienced as an act of forgiveness.¹ He was courted by politicians such as Helmut Schmidt and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, received the Peace Prize of the German publishing industry, and honorary doctorates from the University of Konstanz² and the Free University of Berlin. He died in 1993.

The Imperative of Responsibility

The Imperative of Responsibility is Jonas' magnum opus. Arendt told him that it was 'the book the good Lord had in mind when he made you' (M vii). The writing (in both the German and the English versions) is beautiful, the work of an artist—Jonas, who had once wanted to be a painter, produced an exquisite pencil drawing of Heidegger and loved to recite poetry. The writing is also clear. Though he laments the 'terrible boredom of analytic philosophy' (IR 361), uniquely among post-Kantian German philosophers (save for Schopenhauer), his writing matches up to the highest analytic standards of rigour and clarity. And it is honest. If he believes something but cannot prove it, he says so.

Philosophical worries about modern technology reach back to the beginning of the industrial revolution. Adam Smith worried about the dehumanising effects of factory production in 1776, as did Goethe in 1797 in his retelling the tale of the sorcerer's apprentice. The dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, however, gave a new urgency to such worries: Heidegger's famous 'The Question concerning Technology' was first presented in 1949, and Arendt worried about technology in *The Human Condition* of 1958. What makes Jonas' book different is that he offers a quite practical account of the ethics and politics that we need in order to avoid exterminating ourselves, and offers it in a manner accessible to the general public. The argument of the book is, in outline, the following: (1) There is a crisis, unique to the present age, caused by the power of modern technology and our ignorance of its long-term effects. (2) The ethics of the past do not provide us with an account of how we ought to deal with this crisis. So (3), we need a new ethics, an ethics of 'responsibility' for the future. (4) To count as objective truth, and so possess universal authority, this new ethics must be founded not on human preference, but on 'ontology' (PE 283). I shall now elaborate on each of these steps.

The crisis

Like Heidegger (GTC I 239–40), Jonas thinks there is a uniquely modern crisis caused by the character of modern technological activity. But is the crisis really

unique to modernity? Technology, after all, has always been with us. And has it not always been problematic? Following Heidegger, Jonas focuses on the first choral ode in Sophocles's *Antigone* as a clue to the character of premodern technology.³ The chorus notes that while, with his 'wonderful' technology of plough, ship, and net, man 'wears away' at 'earth', she (Gaya), 'the greatest of the gods', is 'deathless' and 'unwearied' (IR 2). Premodern man knew, comments Jonas, that for all his technological harrying, nature remained essentially undamaged. Indeed, in the relationship between humanity and nature, nature remains the powerful one ('overpowering', as Heidegger puts it) since man must submit to her cycles, the most terrifying of which is death. There is, moreover, no hint in the chorus that the unequal power relation between humanity and nature will ever change: it is a static, eternal relationship (IR 2–3).

One might object that nature's supposed immunity to premodern technological harm underrates the power of saw and fire. The relatively treeless character of modern Greece is largely due to the deforestation carried out by the Greeks' ancient ancestors. Already in the fourth century, Plato complains about it, complains that deforestation and the consequent erosion and pollution of the waterways of his native Attica had left the land a mere 'skeleton of a body, wasted by disease' (*Critias* [111b–d]).⁴ And as Jared Diamond's *Col-lapse* demonstrates, though possessing only premodern technology, the Easter Islanders managed to extinguish their entire civilisation through deforestation. But in the end, of course, Jonas is correct: never before the mid-twentieth century did humanity have the power to terminate itself and perhaps all of sentient life as well.⁵

For Jonas, however, the hydrogen bomb, while a serious problem, is not the worst that we face, for should we decide to use it, we can have relatively exact knowledge of the terrible consequences of our choice. The real problem with modern technology in general is that we have very little idea of its long-term consequences. Technological devices depend of course on good short-term predictions, but their long-term, cumulative consequences reveal themselves only post facto. This is because technology tends to develop a life of its own, to produce consequences that no one had intended, and to do it so fast that those consequences become entrenched before anyone even notices what is happening (IR 31–7). Only after cars have become a necessity of life have we realised that they are killing the planet. Paradoxically, observes Jonas, in spite of the infinite superiority of our natural and social sciences, we know less about our long-term future than did our premodern ancestors. This is because while dynamic, unceasing change is the character of modern society, premodern society was static, as unchanging as the rhythms of nature (IR 119).

We are in crisis, then, because *homo faber* has overtaken *homo sapiens* (IR 9): technological humanity has leapt far ahead of knowing and wise humanity. On account of the enormous gap between our power and our knowledge, we threaten ourselves with extinction as a species, either through a nuclear

holocaust or through a planet rendered no longer capable of supporting human life. And we threaten ourselves in another way too: as Max Weber pointed out (GTC I chap. 1), the industrial and bureaucratic machinery that was intended to serve our interests is threatening to reverse the master–slave relation between man and machine. On the assembly line on the factory floor or in the office above, we are becoming (as Buber and others also observe) mere ‘automata’ (IR 118), servants of the giant administrative machine that was supposed to be our servant. In two ways, then, we are threatened with the ‘death of man’: physical death, but also ‘dehumanization’ (IR 37), reduction of ourselves to a ‘caricature of man’, to ‘robots’ (IR 136). For the first time,

the most elementary of givens taken for granted as the background of all acting and never requiring action itself—that there are men, that there is life, that there is a world for both—this suddenly stands forth, as if lit up by lightening, in its stark peril through human deed.

(IR 139)

The incapacity of all previous ethics to deal with the crisis

All traditional ethics, observes Jonas, were anthropocentric: the topic was always the ‘direct dealings of man with man’. Interactions with non-human nature were ethically neutral, not a topic of ethical concern. Moreover, only current humanity was of ethical concern: ethical behaviour was a matter of dealing properly with one’s ‘neighbours’. The long-term consequences of one’s actions were not considered important and the deliverances of science were irrelevant: Kant, for example, says that only an ‘ordinary intelligence’ is required for right action. All this was fine for the unchanging world of premodernity, but given the dynamism of the modern world, and the unfathomability of the long-term consequences of technological action—an unfathomability, which means that we are currently ‘wagering’ our very existence—an ethics that is constricted by these assumptions is one that has nothing to say about the crisis of our times (IR 4–6).

It is not entirely clear what Jonas means by ‘ethics’. Were he to mean ethical theory, his claim would surely be mistaken. Kant may have thought scientific knowledge of the future consequences of policies of action was irrelevant to moral action, but Kant is not the only ethical theorist. Utilitarianism requires one to assess the consequences of actions, and some of the early utilitarians were themselves social scientists. Moreover, since wisdom and prudence are traditional virtues, virtue ethics also requires careful attention to the consequences of action. But Jonas’ point, I think, concerns not ethics in the sense of ethical theory but rather ethics in the sense of the practical application of ethical theory. And here he is surely correct: in an unchanging world, it is reasonable to assume that what counts as proper action today will continue to do so a hundred

years hence. And in the world of premodern technology, it is safe to assume that nature can take care of herself. But in our dynamic (as Spengler says, 'Faustian') world, neither of these assumptions hold. And so, Jonas concludes, we need a new 'ethics of responsibility', an ethics in which we take responsibility for the long-term effects of our actions on both human and non-human nature.

Value and metaphysics

Ethics, observes Jonas, needs foundations. If we are told that we ought to have the future of humanity and the planet at heart, an entirely rational response is to ask: Why? (IR 25). If someone asks why they should believe that the angles of a Euclidean triangle add up to 180 degrees, the proper response is to demonstrate to them that the proposition is true. Similarly, believes Jonas, there is no chance of convincing people to live by his ethics of responsibility unless one can demonstrate its objective truth in a similar way. Yet the prevalent modern view is that there are no objective ethical truths. Science tells us the facts about the world, and 'value-free' as it is, no values appear among those facts. Values, rather, are the product of either individual or collective human desires. And since such desires are variable, values are both subjectively variable and culturally relative.

Yet we distinguish, Jonas continues, between worthy and unworthy desires and take ourselves to stand under the obligation to pursue only the former; worthy desires have a 'demanding' quality. But no 'voluntaristic or appetitive' theory of value can account for this quality:

If the good is a mere creation of the will it lacks the authority to bind the will. Instead of determining its choice it is subject to it and is one time this, another time that.

(IR 84)⁶

It follows that an ethic that does have the authority to bind the human will must be grounded in something other than human preferences. In a previous age, religion, God's command, provided that authority. But in the present, secular age that kind of authority is no longer available. What we must do, therefore, is to return to the ancient philosophers, in particular to Aristotle, and ground ethics in metaphysics, more specifically in ontology: 'only its foundation in being places [the good] over and against the will' as an independent authority (IR 84). (Notice the close affinity, here, between Jonas and Leo Strauss [GTC II 197–200].)

The will in nature: the 'Aristotelian' account

Jonas' project, then, is to discover values, 'the good', to be part of the reality that is given to us quite independently of what our subjective desires might be. Here is his argument for the existence of such values.

Human beings have 'subjectivity'. We know from our own, first-person perspective that we have consciousness, in particular conscious purposes for the sake of which we act. We perform conscious acts of 'will', and usually our wills are causally effective; they bring about the changes we intend in the material world. A Cartesian dualist, who divides the real into material and mental substance, would account for this in terms of Daniel Dennett's 'skyhooks', incursions into the material world from outside, interventions in the material from the realm of the immaterial.

Jonas has two arguments against dualism. First, while the view is well-tailored to fit the metaphysical needs of traditional religious faith, there are no rational grounds for believing it to be true: there has never been, for example, an interpersonally verified experience of a disembodied mind (IR 67). Second, dualism is inconsistent with the continuity of nature, the gradualness of the transition from the 'highest' form of organic life, ourselves, to our evolutionary origin in the 'lowest': to accommodate the evolutionary facts, the dualist would have to attribute the possession of transcendent, soul-like entities to the lowest amoeba, which would be 'grotesque' (IR 67).

Jonas therefore rejects dualism. In its place, he defends 'monism', a 'monistic emergence theory' (IR 67), the mainstay of which is precisely the continuity principle that dualism cannot accommodate. Human beings are not the only beings that perform conscious acts of will: the higher animals do so as well. Consciousness stops, of course, when we come to plants, but we know from our own case that there can be drives and strivings that exist below the level of consciousness. And so, while it would be absurd to attribute consciousness to plants, that is no bar to attributing to them at least analogues of the human will. And so on down the evolutionary ladder. Even in the simplest organism 'the horizons of selfhood, world and time ... are silhouetted in a premental form'. And even on the inorganic level, there must exist a 'tendency' to purposive life (IR 74–5).

Purposiveness exists, then, throughout nature. At one point, Jonas even seems to flirt with 'panpsychism' (IR 73), the view that 'psyche' or 'inwardness' exists throughout nature, albeit mostly unaccompanied by consciousness, though on other occasions (PE 276) he seems to wish to restrict 'psyche' to the organic. But psyche is not just distributed throughout nature. For Jonas, it is hierarchically distributed in the manner of the 'great chain of being' that, for medieval thought, was the order ordained by God. Human subjectivity is, says Jonas, 'the visible tip of a much larger iceberg' (IR 71) beneath 'the highest ... peak' (IR 129) of the hierarchy of natural species.⁷ And this allows us to ascribe an overall 'volition' to nature—albeit one that 'need not be linked with "knowledge"'—a will to life, in particular to the life of human subjectivity. It makes sense, says Jonas, to view this as that to which, along its 'slow and tortuous paths', nature has been 'labouring' all along. The 'horizons of selfhood' that is intimated in the very first organisms can be regarded as nature's ultimate goal (IR 73–5).

Post-Darwinian thought is, observes Jonas, thoroughly opposed to teleology in nature. And so, he asks, is the above 'Aristotelian' view of nature inconsistent with modern science? Not at all, he replies (effectively deploying Dilthey's distinction between humanistic 'understanding' and natural-scientific 'explanation' [pp. 15–28 above]), for 'comprehending' nature and explaining it are two different things. Purpose, he says, is not offered as causal explanation. Rather he is concerned with what is accomplished 'through' causal explanation (IR 72). There is no challenge to modern science, in particular not to evolution theory. (This is analogous to saying that creationism and evolution theory are both true because in creating the world God created evolution, an analogy of which Jonas is aware [PL 34].) Why, however, should we adopt this interpretation of the evolutionary facts? Jonas says we should adopt it 'ultimately for the sake of ethics' (IR 71). What then is the connection between the 'Aristotelian' understanding of nature and ethics?

From 'is' to 'ought'

Life, Jonas holds, is nature's purpose. It 'wills' life, wills, above all, us. Why should this provide a foundation for ethics? Why should this alleged 'is' ground any kind of an 'ought'? The details of Jonas' argument are a little obscure, but the main thrust seems to be the following. There are two possible stances to the natural world: one can, in the Nietzschean language that Jonas adopts, 'say No' to life or, alternatively, 'say Yes' (IR 81). To say Yes is, as it were, to join nature's team and accept her implicit goals. This is not compulsory: 'we are free to reject the vote of nature ... the partisanship of its purposes' (IR 76). I can say that 'whatever is, deserves to perish'.⁸ But that is something I can 'legitimately', rationally, do only by appealing to some tribunal that transcends the world. That, however, presupposes some kind of dualism, a 'gnostic' ontology according to which this world is the work of the devil and the good and happy world exists in a transcendent realm. As already noted, however, there is no rational reason to believe dualism: the rational view is monism—more exactly, Jonas' 'monistic emergence theory' (IR 67).

To be 'on board' with nature's ends—to 'go *with* the venture', as Rilke puts it (p. 129 above)—does not yet mean that one has an ethics, because nature's ends might be, if not evil, at least morally indifferent. To show that the purposiveness of nature actually grounds an ethics, it needs to be shown that nature's ends are good ones. Jonas effects this piece of—as he admits—unabashed rationalist metaphysics in the style of Leibniz. Is it justified, he asks, that there should be something rather than nothing? Is being of higher value than nonbeing? If, he answers, value is predicable of anything at all, then being is superior to nonbeing, since for something to be valuable, it must exist. But, he says, it is intuitively 'self-eviden[t]' that purposive being is superior to non-purposive

being (a person is more valuable than a rock). Purposive life is, in fact, the good in itself, and therefore that which ‘ought’ to be preserved (IR 80–1).⁹

The ethics of responsibility

Traditional ethics, we saw, is inadequate to deal with the current crisis, the threat to the future of humanity and the planet. What kind of ethics, then, do we now need: what is Jonas’ ‘ethics of responsibility’?

Axiology, Jonas observes, entails deontology. If nature’s will to, valuing of, life—above all, human life—constitutes it the ‘good-in-itself’, then that good is something which ‘ought’ to be realised (IR 79). What then, in the current situation, are the ‘oughts’ that the good-in-itself entails?

‘Responsibility’, observes Jonas, has two meanings. It can be backward looking, in which case it means ‘accountability’, or forward looking, in which case, it means ‘charged with the care of’. Jonas’ sense is the second. His paradigm of such responsibility is the responsibility parents have for their children. As this suggests, the primary objects of responsibility are other human subjects. ‘Mankind’s existence’ is the ‘first commandment’ of the ethics of responsibility (IR 99).¹⁰ Hence, it follows that our fundamental responsibility is to future human generations who, even though they do not yet exist, still have an absolute right to existence that we must never infringe: ‘the existence of “man” must never be put at stake’ (IR 37). Given this, together with the enormous gap between our technological power and our knowledge of its consequences, the remaining ‘oughts’ of Jonas’ ethics follow. Rather than following Marxist utopianism—the title of Jonas’ book is an intentional repost to Bloch’s *Principle of Hope* (the topic of GTC II chap. 2) (IJ 346)—which is prepared to gamble humanity’s very existence for the sake of a future paradise, we must deploy the ‘heuristics of fear’ (IR x). As Hobbes made fear of violent death the starting point of his political philosophy, we must creatively imagine not Marx’s supreme *bonum*, but rather the supreme *malum*, the ‘death of man’, and allow the real possibility of this happening to preside over all our decisions (IR 28). To risk human nonexistence is always wrong, as it is to threaten the spiritual death of man through the ‘dehumanisation’ discussed above (p. 182). In his attempt to achieve certainty, Descartes treated that which is possibly true but open to doubt as false: we must reverse his procedure and treat the doubtful but possibly true as certain (IR 37). We must be guided by a radical version of, as it is now called, the precautionary principle.

Applying the imperative of responsibility

The task of applying the ethics of responsibility is, Jonas believes, one of immense difficulty. The very success of technology has brought about enormous and continually increasing population growth. And consumer capitalism with

its demand for ever-increasing production puts ever greater strain on the environment. We need to introduce a new kind of 'frugality' quite alien to the spirit of modern capitalism: we of the first world, at least, must 'sacrifice' much of what we have come to regard as essential to our way of life. If humanity and the planet are to be saved, there must be coordinated, international political action: no private initiative, no cultural change by individual citizens, will be powerful enough to control the power of runaway technology. And neither will quietism be effective: 'we are confronted with a dialectics of power which can only be overcome by a further degree of power itself, not by a quietist renunciation of power' (IR 141). The trouble with liberal democracies is that they respond only to short-term interests: and, of course, the future generations whose very existence is under threat do not get to vote. It is not impossible, therefore, that preserving the liberty of liberal democracies is too high a price to pay, when the future of the planet is at stake. Circumstances may arise in which only an authoritarian politics (the politics of China, for instance) can save the future of humanity (IR 172–7). Later on, Jonas explicitly endorses the idea behind Article 48 in the constitution of the Weimar Republic (GCT II 175–6): he would accept an authoritarian regime, he tells the interviewer, if it becomes clear that the crisis of modernity can be solved in no other way (IJ 365). (This comes close to endorsing Heidegger's joining the Nazi Party in 1933 on the basis of his hope that, unlike the preceding democratic government, the Nazi dictatorship would be a 'confrontation between modern man and global technology' [IM 199].)

So much for exposition. I attempt now to gain a deeper understanding of Jonas' magnum opus by considering a number of potential criticisms.

Jonas' philosophy of mind

Jonas, we have seen, rejects mind–body 'dualism'. But he also rejects, without ever defining, 'materialism'. What does he mean by 'materialism'? According to materialism, he claims, subjective purposes are mere 'epiphenomena' (MM 170), mere by-products of physical processes that have no causal efficacy in the world, lyric cries in the midst of business, as Santayana put it. Hence, he says, his demonstration (or at least view) that subjective purposes do have causal efficacy, that beliefs and desires produce actions and thereby effect changes in the world, refutes materialism. The 'fabric of events ... therefore, that is physical nature, must have room for such interventions by a nonphysical agency' (IR 64).

The puzzle in Jonas' philosophy of mind is the question of how one can allow interventions in 'physical' reality by a 'nonphysical' agency without lapsing into the mind–body dualism that he absolutely rejects. To try to resolve this puzzle we need, I think, to distinguish between, as I shall call them, ontological and linguistic materialism (or physicalism). The first holds that nothing

non-physical exists, the second, that nothing exists but that which can be described in the language of physics. To make sense of Jonas' non-dualistic rejection of physicalism, a plausible approach is to read him as affirming the first but denying the second. The forming of subjective purposes are genuine interventions in material reality—no mere epiphenomena—he seems to wish to say, but this is a non-dualistic intervention since events of subjective purposing are *also* physical events, neurological events occurring in the brain. On this reading, Jonas seems to subscribe to Spinoza's 'double-aspect' account of the mind–body relation: subjective purposes, the contents of consciousness in general, are the first-person view of mental events, neuroscience provides a third-person view of those very same events. The relation between the mental and the physical is, in short, not an 'either-or' but rather a 'both-and' relation.

The trouble, however, of attributing Spinoza's view to Jonas is that, in spite of describing himself as almost a 'worshipper' of Spinoza (IJ 348), he explicitly rejects the double-aspect theory. 'The trouble with Spinoza', he says, is that, 'for the explanation of why the next movement of the body is this and not that there is no need to resort to mind' (IJ 354). Spinoza might reply that equally there is no need to resort to neuroscience. The main point, however, revealed by this rejection of Spinoza is that, in Jonas' view, subjective purposes sometimes cause changes in the physical world, changes for which there is *no* physical explanation. This, however, is Cartesian dualism, pure and simple. I conclude that, in spite of his denial, to make sense of Jonas' philosophy of mind one needs to read him as a double-aspect theorist. Organic life evolves more and more complex structures until, one day, creatures with a first-person perspective on the world emerge. This, or rather a multi-aspect account of the real, is, after all, what he seems to endorse in saying that there is no incompatibility between his 'comprehending' of nature and science's mechanistic 'explanation' of it (p. 185 above). It is, moreover, Rudolf Bultmann's view as reported by Jonas. Whether we are talking about human or divine intervention in the material world ('miracles' in the latter case), there is an 'identity' between the material and the psychological: the third-person perspective of physics views these events 'from without' while our own first-person perspective views them 'from within'. Jonas rejects this view (MM 155–7), but his reasoning seems to me very confused. He should have accepted the philosophy of mind implicit in the theology of his revered teacher.

Green technology

Jonas, we have seen, believes that to respond to the environmental crisis, a transformation of our Western lifestyle is required: consumer capitalism must give way to a new spirit of 'frugality' and 'sacrifice' (p. 187 above). And it is, of course, on the radical nature of the change he believes to be required that he bases his doubts as to whether liberal democracy is up to the challenge. But do

we really need a new asceticism? Do we really need to sacrifice our cars, washing machines, air conditioners, and so on? Jonas' argument turns on energy.

The problem with energy, he believes, is twofold. First, in the 'closed system' of the earth, there is only a finite amount of it available (during the 1970s, there was a great deal of talk about 'peak oil'). Second, it is impossible to harness what is needed for ever-increasing humanity's ever-increasing devotion to consumerism without contributing to catastrophic climate change. Nuclear energy is no panacea, he claims, because we cannot solve the problem of nuclear waste (IR 190–1). In a footnote, he acknowledges that solar energy avoids all the risks of fossil and nuclear energy (the fact that this crucial information is relegated to a footnote suggests that he sensed a problem with his argument), but goes on to claim that solar energy can only ever produce a fraction of our needs (IR 241). Given the facts that solar is now the cheapest form of energy we have, that it is effectively infinite, that in 2020, European production of electricity from wind and sun exceeded that produced from fossil fuels, and given, too, all our other forms of green technology, it may be that the crisis can be solved without the sacrifices Jonas believes necessary. Had he been able to envisage the future of technology, he might, perhaps, have abandoned his flirtation with authoritarianism.

Jonas and Heidegger

Jonas was one of Heidegger's most gifted and devoted students. He produced a sensitive and affectionate portrait of the young Heidegger in about 1925. Echoing the response of both Gadamer and Arendt, he describes Heidegger's lectures of the period as relieving him of both the tedium of neo-Kantian orthodoxy and the other-worldly 'purity' of Husserl's version of phenomenology. Heidegger, for the first time, made philosophy 'existential' (in the broad sense), made it speak to real-life concerns. The appearance of *Being and Time* in 1927 he described as an 'earthquake' that 'shattered the entire quasi-optical model of a primarily *cognitive* consciousness' that had persisted from Descartes to Husserl, 'focusing instead on the wilful, striving, feeble, and mortal ego'.¹¹ Heidegger's joining the Nazi Party, however, was another earthquake. Unlike Arendt, Jonas never forgave him: how on earth could a great philosopher's philosophy not have prevented him from doing so? After the war, all of Jonas' discussions of Heidegger are devoted to revealing the flaw in the philosophy that permitted his pact with the devil.

Unlike some Heidegger scholars, Jonas takes Heidegger at his word when he claims that, beginning in 1930, there was a radical 'turning' or 'reversal'—as it were, a Copernican revolution—in his philosophy (GTC I 232–5). And so Jonas' Heidegger critique divides into two parts: a critique of the early philosophy of *Being and Time*, and a critique of the later, post-turning Heidegger.

The critique of *Being and Time* is coupled with a critique of existentialism in general, of which he takes Heidegger to be one of the founders. Existentialism, he claims, drawing on his own earlier research, is a rebirth of Gnosticism.

Gnosticism flourished within both Christian and Jewish sects in the first two centuries of the Christian era. It was, argues Jonas, the product of social alienation: within the minority and slave classes, the laws of the Roman Empire were experienced as an oppressive but overpowering force. Inhabiting a fundamental mood of dread, Gnostics projected their alienation onto the cosmos in general. According to Gnosticism, as we saw (p. 167 above), the world is the creation of a demiurge (roughly, the devil) and is governed by the lust for power and dominion. We are homeless in this world. The Homeless self is not, however, the 'soul', which is part of nature, but rather the *pneuma*, that 'indefinable spiritual core of existence, the foreign spark'.¹² (Notice that this 'gnostic' distinction is precisely Stein's distinction between soul and spirit [p. 79 above].) Our situation is not, however, hopeless. There is a true God—as distinct from the false world-creator—who has, however, no concern for this world and does not reveal himself in it: the true world is the total 'Other' of this one (GMN 435). Gnosticism—from the Greek *gnosis*, 'to know'—is this double knowledge: the knowledge of the 'falseness' of this world and the revelatory knowledge of the existence of the true world in which our salvation lies.

Three features, then, define Gnosticism: a radical metaphysical dualism between two worlds and two selves, the assertion that we are 'homeless' in this world, and 'antinomianism', a radical rejection of the ethical norms of this world: 'the angels that created the world established "just actions" to lead men by such precepts into servitude', as the Christian heretic Simon Magnus put it (GMN 443). Gnostic antinomianism, emphasises Jonas, is not ethical subjectivism but rather 'a positive metaphysical interest in repudiating allegiance to any objective norms' in the interest of 'authentic freedom' (GMN 444).¹³ Jonas finds all these features repeated in existentialism in general and in *Being and Time* in particular.

Dualism, claims Jonas, dominates *Being and Time*. Not the dualism between this world and a divine world but rather between being and nonbeing, the 'nothingness' that haunts us in the form of the omnipresence of death (GMN 448). This means, he says, that 'nihilism', the perceived worthlessness of existence, is, in existential philosophy, even more intense than in Gnosticism proper (GMN 451), for while in the latter, there is hope, in the former, there is none. Second, the 'thrownness'—'homelessness', 'abandonment'—that is a necessary feature of being-in-the-world in *Being and Time* (GTC I 128–30) comes directly out of Gnostic literature: a formula of the Valentian school runs, 'What makes us free is the knowledge ... wherein we have been thrown' (GMN 446). Finally, and most importantly, antinomianism reappears in all forms of existentialism: for existentialists, claims Jonas, authentic freedom requires the rejection of all objective norms: authentic values are, as

Sartre puts it, always our own ‘projection’ (GMN 447). And for Heidegger, too, authenticity is a matter of *not* thinking or acting as ‘one’ acts (a matter of freeing oneself from the ‘dictatorship of the One’ [GTC I 138]), of rejecting the norms of the world (PEC 819). There are, claims Jonas, no ethics in *Being and Time* ‘nor, as far as I know... in his later works’ (PEC 820). *Being and Time*, to be sure, does have a normative distinction between authentic and inauthentic life, coupled with an injunction to be authentic (ibid.). But being authentic, which, more fully described, consists in being ‘resolute’, is a matter of form and not content. This is where responsibility for Heidegger’s ‘leap’ into the arms of the Nazis lies: ‘the absolute formalism of his philosophy of decision’ in which ‘not for what or against what one resolves oneself, but that one resolves oneself becomes the signature of authentic Dasein’.¹⁴ This ‘decisionist’ reading of *Being and Time* repeats that of Karl Löwith (GTC I 149), whom Jonas greatly admired and regarded as most gifted of an earlier generation of Heidegger students (M x). Resoluteness, claims Löwith, is a matter of style: of imperious, implacable, dictatorial scorn for the masses, and contempt for reason and argument. Given that this is what authenticity amounts to, claims Löwith, there was a natural fit between Heideggerian resoluteness and the jackbooted style of the SS trooper:

[E]xpressions of violence and resolve, determine throughout the vocabulary of National Socialist politics and Heidegger’s philosophy. The apodictic character of Heidegger’s emotive formulations correspond to the dictatorial style of the politics.¹⁵

As earlier observed (p. 110 above), many people—like Löwith—fail to read *Being and Time* to the end and so fail to notice that ‘resoluteness’ is not at all a matter of form without content. For Heidegger himself explicitly notes that authentically facing up to death does not determine the content of the authentic life and so explicitly poses the question of ‘whence ... [authentic] Dasein can draw those possibilities on which it facticially projects itself’ (BT 383). His answer is that the content of the authentic, resolute life is derived ‘from heritage’, from the ethical tradition of one’s community, the ‘sole authority a free existing can have’ (BT 391) and the sole source of ‘the good’ (BT 383). Fully described, authenticity is a matter of inhabiting Jasper’s ‘moment of vision’ (p. 33 above), freeing oneself from ‘lostness’ in *prevailing* public opinion so that one sees the gap between it and the ethical ideals, the *deep* ethical norms, of one’s community. Awareness of the gap, combined with the facts of one’s nature and circumstances, allows one to see what must be done. (For a full discussion of resoluteness and heritage, see GTC I 144–52.) And so there is, in fact, no decisionism in *Being and Time*—although, as Jonas says, there certainly is in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, for which values really are the products of individual decision.

Yet although there is no subjectivism about value in *Being and Time*, given that the ethical heritage of one community may well be different from that of another, early Heidegger really is committed to relativism about values. I conclude, therefore, that since by 'ethics' Jonas means objective, culture-independent norms of action, his conclusion—though not his argument—that there are no ethics in *Being and Time* is correct. He also seems to me correct in locating *Being and Time* within a partial analogue of gnostic consciousness: I myself have pointed out that the key terms in the work—'anxiety', 'homelessness', 'guilt', 'thrownness', 'abandonment'—belong to a single emotional register and serve to articulate the desolation of a post-death-of-God consciousness (GTC I 147).

Here, however, my agreement with Jonas' Heidegger critique ends. His critique of the post-turning, later Heidegger, seem to me a matter of—I think wilful—obtuseness. Disregarding some cheap insults (the later Heidegger is no longer a 'rational' philosopher) Jonas makes two main claims: Heidegger's rejection of 'metaphysics' is fake since he himself is a metaphysician, and, as already intimated, there are no ethics in later Heidegger any more than there are in earlier Heidegger.

* * *

With respect to metaphysics, Jonas claims that Heidegger tries to have his cake and eat it. On the one hand, he rejects metaphysics, claiming being to be conceptually ungraspable while, on the other, he speaks of being 'unveiling' itself in the holiness of 'the gods' (HT 212) and of the intelligible world as something 'sent' to us by being. But how, asks Jonas, can there be an unveiling without an unveiler, how can there be a sending without a sender? Along with all other metaphysicians, therefore, Heidegger himself reduces being to a being: 'being is hypostasized in Heidegger, as was "the good" in Plato and the *causa sui* in Spinoza, only, to be sure, not in the category of substance' (HT 223).

Heidegger does indeed reject something he calls 'metaphysics', which he understands as the proffering of some account of the ultimately real coupled with the claim that it alone is the correct account. A 'metaphysician' in this sense is someone who says not merely that 'the world is X' but also that it is 'nothing but X', where X might be water, matter, mind, will—or marshmallow. The paradigm form of a 'metaphysical' assertion is Nietzsche's 'The world is will to power—and nothing besides' (*Beyond Good and Evil* sec. 36), which is why Heidegger calls him 'the last metaphysician'. It is not merely asserting an account of the fundamentally real that makes one a metaphysician in Heidegger's sense but rather the exclusionary manner in which one makes that assertion. Metaphysics, in Heidegger's sense, if offered as more than a game, is the product of Erich Fromm's 'authoritarian personality' (pp. 208–9 below), as much a personal as a philosophical failing.

Heidegger regards metaphysics in his sense as both false and spiritually crippling. It is false because it fails to understand the inevitably perspectival (but non-‘relative’) character of truth: the fact that truth requires intelligibility and intelligibility requires a scheme of intelligibility which—as Spinoza grasped—inevitably picks out one particular aspect of infinitely-aspected reality. And it is spiritually crippling because, by removing the infinite, ungraspable ‘mystery’ that is concealed behind whatever scheme of intelligibility we employ, it denudes being of its holiness, prevents it from being an object of, in Jonas’ language, ‘reverence’, ‘piety’ (IR 89, 33). (For a fuller account of Heidegger’s theory of truth and critique of metaphysics, see GTC I 232–7.)

There is a certain insight in Jonas’ claim that Heidegger really is a ‘metaphysician’. If we think of metaphysics as the attempt to account for the ‘origin’ of all things, then Heidegger does offer a metaphysics—a metaphysics, as the analytic philosopher Mark Johnson points out, of overflowing love.¹⁶ Implicit in many later works, Heidegger’s ‘metaphysics’ appears most explicitly in ‘What Are Poets For?’, his already-discussed meditation, with and through Rainer Maria Rilke’s poetry, on death (pp. 129–30 above). As part of its ‘venture’, says the poet, ‘nature’, the ‘primordial ground of our being’, ‘throws us forth’ into ‘danger’. We are offered no ‘special protection’: like animals and plants, we are fragile, mortal beings. But—here is the crucial change from ‘thrownness’ as conceived in *Being and Time* that lies at the heart of ‘the turning’—we are ‘not abandoned’. Rather, the primordial ground holds us in the ‘pure draft’ of the ‘gravitational attraction’ to itself as the ‘unheard centre’. We can, of course, set our course against the ‘venture’, violate it, which is what modern technology does. But if we are open to the pure draft, we ‘go with the venture, will it’: we allow our technological being-in-the-world to be the preserving and completing of nature’s ‘venture’. This, say the philosopher and the poet, ‘creates for us a safety ... just there where the pure forces’ gravity rules’. In responding to the unheard centre’s appropriation of us, we allow ourselves to be absorbed into the venture. And since the distinction between the will of the venture and one’s own will has now disappeared, and since the venture is eternal, we transcend the ‘danger’, transcend death. The result is that we feel, in Wittgenstein’s words, ‘safe, whatever happens’.

There is, then, a kind of metaphysics in the later Heidegger. And Jonas is correct: being is represented as belonging not to the category of substance but rather, as in the ‘process philosophy’ of Alfred North Whitehead (HT 224), to that of process. The divine origin (Scheler’s ‘unfinished God’ [GTC II 162]) is slowly seeking to unfold itself in the world in the way in which a rose unfolds itself in its blossom, an unfolding that can be either helped or hindered by us. This, clearly, is a kind of metaphysics. The question, however, is whether it is metaphysics in the sense anathematised by Heidegger. And the answer is that it is not. For Heidegger never claims that this is the *only* account of being that can be given. The poet, he admits, does use the ‘language of metaphysics’

(PLT 94, 103). But he is not doing metaphysics in the anathematised sense, but rather—poetry. He is providing a poetic disclosure of being but by no means excludes other, non-poetic disclosures. (In a similar way, in the ‘Letter on Humanism’, Heidegger admits to himself using the ‘language of metaphysics’, but he is not, he says, *doing* metaphysics since ‘[an]other language remains in the background’ [PM 239 n].) Jonas, we saw, claims that the disclosure of being which he provides ‘for the sake of ethics’ does not challenge the validity of the causal explanations of natural science (p. 185 above). This is Heidegger’s position too. The poet’s disclosure of the real, we are about to see, is what we need in order to understand how we are to live and die, but it is entirely compatible with the disclosure provided by, for example, evolutionary biology.

* * *

Jonas’ second criticism of the later Heidegger has already been intimated: there are no ethics in *Being and Time* ‘or anywhere else in Heidegger’s philosophy’ (p. 191 above). Why are there no ethics in the later Heidegger?

Heidegger’s ‘turning’ is a turn away from Dasein and towards being. Instead of the ‘meaning of being’ being a human projection, that meaning, the intelligibility of the world, is something ‘gifted’ to us from out of the ‘mystery’ that is being itself: ‘the meaning of being’ becomes a subjective as well as objective genitive. Essential or ‘meditative’ thinking is a matter of listening to the call of being (of the ‘unheard-of-centre’) and, in action, becoming the ‘shepherd’ or ‘guardian’ of being: someone, that is, who ‘cares for’ being’s ‘venture’ in the world. Borrowing Nietzsche’s deflation of Wagner’s self-aggrandisement,¹⁷ Jonas claims that this turns the essential thinker (i.e., Heidegger) into the ‘ventriloquist of being’. Jonas comments:

Man: the shepherd of being—not, mind you, of beings! ... it is hard to hear man hailed as the shepherd of being when he [Heidegger, in particular] has just so dismally failed to be his brother’s keeper. ... Not by the being of another person am I grasped but just by “being”.

(HT 229)

Thinking about being, then, diverts one from one’s responsibility for beings and in particular for one’s fellow human beings.¹⁸ And, moreover, insofar as the ‘call of being’ leads us to action, it is just as likely to be wicked action (such as joining the Nazi party) as virtuous action, since ‘it is impossible to distinguish between the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and ... [that of] demons’ (HT 226).

The response to the first part of this criticism is implicit in what has already been said. *Of course* being the ‘shepherd of being’ (note once again the double genitive) is being the shepherd of beings, too, since it is in beings that being’s

'venture' reveals itself. (In caring for a person's body, the doctor also cares for *the person*.) The broad structure of that venture is what Heidegger calls 'the fourfold', the fourfold of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. Those who 'dwell' in the fourfold world as opposed to being 'homeless' in it, those who go 'with' rather than against the 'venture', exhibit their dwelling in nurturing each element of the fourfold: in caring for nature—'earth' and 'sky'—on the one hand, and humanity—'mortals' and the 'divinities' that personify their ideals—on the other. The fourfold is, says Heidegger, an indissoluble unity, so that to care for one element is to care for all: one cares, not for the natural environment *rather than* human beings, or for human beings rather than the environment, but rather for both together as an indissoluble unity. Caring for the 'mortal' aspect of this unity is, *of course*, 'being one's brother's keeper'.¹⁹

The second part of the criticism is a criticism of 'charismatic' thought in general (HT 228). It represents an attempt to align Heidegger with Kierkegaard, whose ultimate hero, Abraham, as we have seen (p. 163 above), is willing to murder his son Isaac because he thinks he hears the voice of God telling him to prove his obedience. As Kierkegaard 'suspends' the laws of morality in favour of personal revelation, so, claims Jonas, does Heidegger. And it is true that nothing like the Mosaic code appears in Heidegger's thought. But Jonas' portrait of the shepherd of being as the subject of 'permanent revelation' (HT 225), as obeying a voice that at one time may command this and at another time that, is a caricature. Being's 'venture' is disclosed not by an inner voice, but in the structure of the outer world that the 'shepherd' finds all around him. It is, in part, a matter of being a good phenomenologist.

* * *

Jonas never mentions the fourfold. He seems, in fact, to have read very little of later Heidegger: it is perverse that, focused on modern technology as he is, he never mentions the seminal 'The Question concerning Technology'. Given that he criticises Arendt for her ignorance of Judaism (p. 179 above), he ought to have read what he tries to criticise. And his gloating in the furore created by his 'Heidegger and Theology' lecture, together with the vainglorious claim that it was a 'disaster for Heidegger' (M 290), is one of the few blemishes on an admirable life. Jonas' hatred of his former mentor is of course 'human': but it is also all-too-human. And what it blinds him to is the already mentioned convergence of his own later thought with that of the later Heidegger. Thus, as Jonas grounds our responsibility for nature and for future humanity in nature's 'volition' (p. 184 above), in its 'creative intention' (PL 234), so Heidegger grounds it in nature's 'venture', its 'will'. (Jonas, too, speaks of a 'venture' [PE 5] and, later in the same work, writes that 'in the beginning ... the Divine chose to give itself over to chance and risk', which reads almost like a quotation from 'What Are Poets For?' [PE 275].) And as Jonas thinks

that 'to a sight not blocked by selfishness or dimmed by dullness' nature is an object of, of 'gratitude and piety' (IR 33), so Heidegger thinks that if our sight is not blocked by reductive technological 'enframing' (GTC I 339–40), we can become open to the 'wonder' of being, 'the wonder that around us a world worlds, that there is something rather than nothing, that there are beings, and we ourselves are in their midst'. The natural response to this 'gift' of intelligibility is, he says, using the same word as Jonas, 'gratitude': 'thinking' is 'thanking'. 'Insofar as we think in the most serious way, we give thanks' (p. 55 above). Finally, as Jonas thinks we are responsible for preserving the human race, so, too, does Heidegger: as already noted, 'mortals', especially mortals in their mortality, are among the things that the one who dwells cares for. Much like his friend Leo Strauss (GTC II 212), in short, Jonas mistakes for an enemy someone who is, philosophically speaking, a friend.

Jonas' humanism

In his 'Letter on Humanism', Heidegger, we have seen (p. 194 above), gives the term 'humanism' the pejorative meaning of 'human chauvinism'—a version of what we would now call 'speciesism', something that would be condemned by any animal rights activist or deep ecologist. Is Jonas guilty of speciesism? It is clear that Jonas cares for non-human beings, for the non-human environment. The crucial question, however, is whether he so cares only because, and insofar as, a thriving nature is essential to human survival and flourishing, or whether he believes we should care for nature for its own sake as well as for ours. There are conflicting currents.

Early in *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Jonas says that we should be at least 'open' to the idea that the 'biosphere' (but not, apparently, rivers or mountain ranges) has a 'moral' claim on us, open to the idea that we should care for it for its own sake and 'in its own right', and that in virtue of our superior and unique power, we are committed to the 'stewardship' of nature (IR 8). This is precisely the later Heidegger's view. He writes, as we have seen (pp. 194–5 above), that human chauvinism 'does not put the *humanitas* of man high enough' because it fails to see that our elevation above the rest of nature consists in our task of stewardship, our task of care, of being the 'shepherd of being' (PM 251–2). But Jonas only entertains this view, never actually affirms it, and by the end of the book has clearly rejected it. In the 'struggle for existence', he writes, where there is conflict of interest between humanity and non-human nature, 'man ... comes first' (IR 137). The basic reason that this has to be his view is that since, as we have seen, he takes human purposiveness to be the 'highest peak' of the 'ascending scale' of the 'hierarchy' of species (PL 2), it would be contrary to nature's 'volition' (p. 184 above) to prefer the collective interest of some or even all of the rest of nature to human interests. If 'human subjectivity' is nature's ultimate goal, it

would not be contrary to nature to kick away some or all of the rungs on the ladder on which it has climbed up to this ultimate goal, should they no longer serve human interests: artists, after all, often destroy the preparatory sketches for the final work. This is a bad outlook for, inter alia, sharks. Very clearly, then, Jonas really is a 'humanist', even an extreme humanist. We are responsible for non-human nature only to the (admittedly considerable) extent that we humans need it. Both Heidegger and Jonas have influenced the environmental movement. It is clear, however, that Jonas represents an older style of environmentalism, which is now widely recognised to be inadequate. With rivers and mountains beginning to acquire the status of legal personhood, it is now clear that an adequate ethics of environmental responsibility cannot be based on human interest alone. Heidegger's view that all the elements of the fourfold deserve our care, that none takes precedence over the others, is the kind of philosophical grounding that is implicit in the best of current environmental thinking.

Postscript on utopia

The final chapter of *The Imperative of Responsibility* is devoted to a critique of Marxist utopianism, in particular that of Ernst Bloch (GTC II chap. 2), whose Marxism Jonas rejects, but whom he admires for frankly stating the utopian goal they both take to be the essence of Marxism. Save for the point that the crisis of our times requires preservation of what there is rather than risk-taking in the interests of future perfection (p. 186 above), the discussion of Bloch is tangential to the main concern of the book. And entirely irrelevant to that concern is Jonas' critique of the very concept of utopia. Still, since he makes that critique, I should like to offer a few sentences in Bloch's defence.

Common to all conceptions of utopia, observes Jonas, is the assumption that machines will one day have relieved human beings of the necessity to work. But that creates, as Bloch frankly admits, the 'problem of leisure': we will need to do something with the time that is no longer filled by the necessity of work. Bloch says that, because we are active beings, what we do will need to have the character of work (GTC II 57), with the sole difference that because it is no longer work that we *have* to do, it will count, as Jonas puts it, as a 'hobby'. But hobbies, he claims, are meaningless: in the larger scheme of things, we experience them as 'worthless' (IR 194–8).

By the time he wrote *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Jonas had retired from his university post (as the author of this book has retired from his). His writing was therefore, by his own lights, a 'hobby'. If he had reflected for a moment on his own creative activity, he would have seen how wide of the mark his Bloch critique is, would have recalled that, even when work is no longer performed out of external necessity, inner necessities remain.²⁰

Notes

- 1 Schütze (1995).
- 2 The Konstanz doctorate was bestowed in 1991, the year in which the present author was a visitor to Konstanz University (and attending Honneth's seminar [p. 228 below]). Unfortunately, I knew nothing of the award.
- 3 Heidegger discusses this chorus in both the *Introduction to Metaphysics* and in the lectures on Hölderlin's *Der Ister*.
- 4 High amounts of black carbon discovered deep in the Antarctic ice dating back 700 years have been shown to be the result of land clearance in New Zealand by the Maori. Burning emissions from New Zealand in the sixteenth century were, in fact, comparable to those following the arrival of the Europeans in the nineteenth century (*Guardian* 14 Oct. 2021).
- 5 Many philosophers, Spengler, Heidegger, Horkheimer, and Adorno among them, have argued that the cast of mind that underlies modern technological behaviour has been developing in the West for one or more millennia. Jonas, however, is not committed to denying this: his point is that the results of that development first reached a crisis point in the twentieth century.
- 6 This is Kierkegaard's point about the 'aesthetic' form of life: since desires are fickle, the life in which nothing has authority over desire is permanently 'experimental', lacking in 'seriousness' (p. 165 above).
- 7 Given the 'open-ended adventurousness of life' (PL 45–6), one might wonder whether, one day, there might not appear an even higher 'peak' than ourselves. Nature might have even bigger ideas than us.
- 8 This, surely, is a gesture to Schelling and Schopenhauer both of whom oppose the mechanistic understanding of nature and postulate, instead, a primal 'will' towards conscious life as the metaphysical ground and origin of nature. It is unclear whether Jonas read Schelling, but he certainly read Schopenhauer (IJ 343). Like Jonas, Schopenhauer takes the conscious will of human beings as his starting point and then uses the fact that 'nature makes no leaps' (Schopenhauer [1966] II 184) to 'extend' the will 'downwards' to embrace all natural phenomena. Like Jonas, Schopenhauer says that it would be 'absurd' (WR I 105) to extend consciousness further than the higher animals and so insists that the will that manifests itself in lower forms of life, and even in so-called inorganic matter, must be 'blind', devoid of 'knowledge' (Schopenhauer [1966] I 115). Famously, of course, Schopenhauer is a pessimist. Nature is not divine but rather demonic (Schopenhauer [1966] II 349–50): only a sadist would condemn life to the necessity of feeding on life to live. He concludes that life and the world are things which 'ought not to be', that existence is 'an error' (Schopenhauer [1966] II 605). Jonas would have regarded Schopenhauer as a gnostic, which is one way of reading him. Another reading, however, as Nietzsche saw, is an even bleaker form of pessimism that Jonas does not consider: this world is evil, and it is the *only* world.
- 9 In *Mortality and Morality*, he has second thoughts about this appeal to intuition: subjectivism about values, the view that all values are matters of individual taste, cannot be refuted, he now decides, which rules out moral 'intuition' as a source of objective truth (MM 107–8).
- 10 Actually, it seems to be the only fundamental commandment: somewhat like the categorical imperative in Kant's ethics or the greatest happiness principle in utilitarianism, all Jonas' remaining 'oughts' seem to follow from the conjunction of the first commandment with the current state of the world.
- 11 Jonas (1994) 815–17.
- 12 Jonas (1952) 444.
- 13 Notice how well Jonas' account of Gnosticism fits the QAnon conspiracy theory that flourished in 2020–22, a theory that attributes to itself the esoteric knowledge that this world is governed by Satan-worshipping paedophiles. Corresponding to the 'precepts' which lead men into servitude are the norms of 'liberal elites'. When this is coupled with the idea of 'the rapture', the parallel with Gnosticism becomes exact.
- 14 Jonas (1990) 201.
- 15 Quoted and discussed in Young (1997) 79–83. In this work, I classify the Löwith-Jonas critique of *Being and Time* as a 'negative' rather than 'positive' implication critique. I view it as claiming not that *Being and Time* positively required Heidegger to become a Nazi but, more weakly, as failing to

prohibit his doing so. I now see that it should really be classified as a positive implication critique: the philosophy of *Being and Time*, the claim is, positively requires authentic Dasein to become, if not precisely a Nazi, at least a member of a militarised dictatorship of which Nazism was, at the time, the only version on offer in Germany.

- 16 See Johnson (2009) 106n, 121, 128.
- 17 Wagner presents himself as 'God's ventriloquist', claims Nietzsche, poses as someone with a 'telephone to the beyond' (Young [2010] 471).
- 18 Jonas here reproduces pretty much word for word the Heidegger critique of another of Heidegger's Jewish students, Emmanuel Levinas (see Levinas [1951]).
- 19 For a fuller account of this breathless summary, see GTC I 246–50. It might be thought that 'caring for the fourfold' is too nebulous to count as ethics. In his one detailed discussion of what caring for might amount to in practice, his discussion of what it is to care for the fourfold as an architect (see also p. 130 above), Heidegger shows this not the case, the proof of which is that 'Building Dwelling Thinking' has been, for decades, required reading in many architecture schools. For an account of what 'caring for the fourfold' might amount to in practice in cases other than architecture, see Young (2002) chap. 8.
- 20 This chapter has been greatly improved by an extended correspondence with Lawrence Vogel. I should hasten to add, however, that he would probably disagree with much, possibly most, of what I have written.

7 Erich Fromm

Humanistic psychology

Erich Fromm was born into a middle-class Orthodox Jewish household in Frankfurt in 1900 (the year of Nietzsche's death). Under the influence of Rabbi Nehemia Nobel, he developed an early interest in Judaism, particularly in the Hassidic tradition, which believed in a mystically immanent God and in prophetic leadership. For a short time, he counted himself a Zionist, but he soon abandoned Zionism and became a life-long opponent of all forms of nationalism. After two semesters at the University of Frankfurt, he moved to Heidelberg where he studied sociology with Karl Jaspers and Alfred Weber (brother of the more famous Max), completing a doctorate in sociology in 1922. While studying in Heidelberg, Fromm underwent psychoanalysis with Frieda Reichmann who, eleven years his senior, both seduced him and encouraged him to become a psychoanalyst himself. They married in 1926 (but separated five years later) and opened a joint psychoanalytic practice in Heidelberg in 1927.

Fromm's first publications were scholarly articles written from the perspective of an orthodox Freudian. In 1930, wishing to introduce psychoanalysis into the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School, its director, Max Horkheimer, made Fromm a tenured member of the Institute for Social Research (GTC I chap. 2). Together with Wilhelm Reich and other psychoanalysts, Fromm now became committed to the project of producing a fusion between Marx and Freud, a project that also engaged two later additions to the Institute, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno. The main research Fromm completed for the Institute was a massive social-psychological survey of the German working class, which revealed their surprisingly 'authoritarian' character structure (pp. 208–9 below), a willingness both to submit to authority and to be authoritarian themselves. This survey would later form the basis of both his and Adorno's use of the concept of the 'authoritarian personality' to explain the rise of Nazism. In 1934, understanding earlier than most that there was no place for Jews (or Marxists) in Nazi Germany, Fromm emigrated to the United States. The sociology department of New York's Columbia University wished to employ him, but he insisted that if they wanted him, they would need to accept the entire Institute as well. Thanks to Fromm's negotiations, the entire Institute—almost all its members were Jews—moved to Columbia in the same year.

By 1930, Fromm already had doubts about Freudian orthodoxy. By the time he arrived in America, he was clearly a neo-Freudian, respectful of the master's genius but with serious reservations about many of his key ideas. In New York, Fromm developed close relations with other neo-Freudians such as Karen Horney (later one of his many lovers), a founding figure in feminist psychoanalysis. As we shall see, the conflict with the orthodox Freudians was essentially a question of nature versus nurture: whereas Freud held that libidinal egoism was biologically hardwired into the human being so that conflict between the 'pleasure principle' and society's 'reality principle' was inevitable and eternal (GTC I 67–75), 'cultural psychoanalysts' such as Horney and Fromm held that the human subject is not necessarily asocial, and that culture, and particularly early childhood training, is a more important determinant of human behaviour than biology.

Fromm's tenured position with the Institute was terminated in 1939, and even though it would probably not have survived the war without him, he was subsequently written out of its history. Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality*, for instance, even though largely based on Fromm's survey of German workers, acknowledges him not at all. Partly, the matter was personal. Fromm, who had already visited and lectured in Chicago in 1933, had eagerly embraced American life. He had improved his already fluent English to a more-than-native competence, while his colleagues struggled with the language and preferred to speak German whenever they could. Adorno in particular had never liked Fromm: he thought his willingness to embrace liberal democracy 'sentimental', and called him a 'professional Jew' on account of his attachment to Hasidic culture. (In return, Fromm called Adorno a 'puffed up phrase maker with no convictions and nothing to say'.)¹ Moreover, whereas Horkheimer and Adorno preferred to remain ivory-towered scholars and (particularly Adorno) wrote in a correspondingly hermetic manner, Fromm, influenced by the Jewish prophetic tradition, was increasingly discovering his vocation as a public intellectual and wished to write in a correspondingly accessible manner—something Adorno would have scorned as 'popularisation'. The main problem, however, was doctrinal: whereas Fromm was now clearly a Freudian revisionist, Freudian orthodoxy, Freudian biologism, had become, for the Frankfurt School, an article of faith: 'psychology without libido', wrote Horkheimer, 'is in a way no psychology'.² For Adorno in particular, the real as opposed to social self always stands in a 'negative', oppositional relation to society, a stance that constitutes the permanent possibility of revolution (a view also held by Foucault). The issue was revived by Marcuse in the 1950s who, in a bad-tempered exchange in the journal *Dissent*, complained about the absence of a 'great refusal' in Fromm.³ If, Marcuse argued, the self is socially constructed, then it is left with no capacity for social criticism since that which is created by social norms will, of course, conform to those norms. (Heidegger deals with this objection by distinguishing between the deep and current values of the social

whole, Honneth by arguing that what is socially constructed is a system of individual rights that can be infringed as well as duties to be performed [p. 231 below].) As we shall see, probably as a response to his Frankfurt critics, Fromm becomes increasingly concerned to show that his social psychology really does allow for an adversarial relationship between individual and society.

In 1940, Fromm became an American citizen, and in the following year, published an accessible version of the scholarship of the previous decade entitled *Escape from Freedom* (*Fear of Freedom* in Britain), a best-seller which sold over 5 million copies and was translated into 27 languages. *Man for Himself* followed in 1947. In 1944, Fromm married Henny Gurland, and in 1950, moved to Mexico City, though he continued to make frequent visits to the United States. In part, this was an effort to cure Henny's depression, but the effort failed when she committed suicide two years later. The following year, he married his third and final wife, Annis Freeman. In 1955, Fromm published *The Sane Society*, which, as we shall see, called for the institution of 'communitarian socialism', and the following year *The Art of Loving*, which sold over 25 million copies. With these works Fromm became a famous public intellectual, almost a guru. In the mid-1950s, he became a peace activist promoting nuclear disarmament to important political friends, such as Adlai Stevenson, Eugene McCarthy, and William Fulbright. President Kennedy read *Escape from Freedom* and, subsequent to the Cuba missile crisis, may have been influenced by Fromm's call for detente with the Soviet Union. In 1973, he and Annis settled permanently in Locarno, Switzerland, and three years later, he produced his last book, *To Have or to Be?*, which sold 10 million copies and became a canonical work for the anti-materialist European counterculture. He died in Switzerland 1980 as result of a fourth heart attack.

The main focus in what follows will be on what seem to me Fromm's three most substantial works, *Escape from Freedom*, *Man for Himself*, and *The Sane Society*.

Section I: *Escape from Freedom*

Escape from Freedom, the first of Fromm's major works, is an accessible summation of his scholarly publications of the 1930s. It was published in 1941 in New York prior to America's entry into the Second World War, and prior also to, in Churchill's phrase, the 'turn of the tide' in 1942. It was written at a time, therefore, at which the outcome of the war was still uncertain. Its main, though not only, purpose is to provide a psychological study of the source of Hitler's hold over the German population.

The problem

At least officially, writes Fromm, the history of the West is the history of the struggle for the freedom of the individual, a struggle that culminates in the

arrival of liberal democracy. Freedom, freedom from the power of nature and from human oppression, seems to be our highest value and achievement. Yet in fact, the current situation is marked, not by freedom, but rather by the attempt to 'escape' from it (an attempt Sartre calls 'bad faith', at almost exactly the same time). In Germany, the masses are giving up their freedom in slavish devotion to Hitler; in America, they are becoming 'automata' slavishly subservient to the cultural patterns of American society. How, asks Fromm, has this come about, and what can be done to reverse the trend? (EF 1–5).

The method of investigation: social psychology

Fromm, recall, began his professional life as a Freudian psychoanalyst. Along with Nietzsche, he observes, it was Freud's genius that revealed the diabolical and irrational still present in modern humanity, though lurking below the level of consciousness (EF 5–6). But although Fromm is profoundly respectful of Freud, his method for investigating the flight from freedom is developed through a progressive liberation from Freudian orthodoxy.

As Fromm says, Freud's picture of the relation between individual and society is a 'static', ahistorical one, eternally, biologically the same (EF 9). On the one side is the individual, driven by nothing but the quest for libidinal, ultimately sexual, pleasure, and on the other is society whose 'reality principle' must restrict, 'domesticate', the pleasure principle (EF 8). Since the undomesticated libido of one individual obviously clashes with that of another, society must repress the pleasure principle through either the external police, the internal police of the superego, or else the gentler form of repression called 'sublimation'. As Fromm notes (MFH 71), Freud's account of the situation of the individual in society is really just a psychological version of Hobbes's account of the emergence of civilisation from the free but insecure 'state of nature'. (Freud indeed uses markedly Hobbesian language: since, he says, civilised humanity had traded a 'portion of ... happiness' for a 'portion of security', 'civilization' is bound to be accompanied by 'discontent'.)⁴ This necessary antagonism between individual and society is what, for Adorno and Marcuse, gives Freudianism its critical edge.

Fromm rejects many of the well-known elements of Freud's theory—there is an 'Oedipus complex' but it has to do with power, not sex (EF 171)—but two interconnected objections are of particular importance for the development of his own social psychology. First, he objects to Freud's view of the impulse to destruction as a permanent element in human nature. Freud's convoluted account of the disposition to violence is the following. The pleasure principle in the individual dictates a 'death instinct', a desire to return, through death, to the 'tension'-free nothingness of the womb. (Freudians call this the 'nirvana principle', Wagnerians might call it the '*Tristan* principle'.) But since the drive to self-preservation normally forbids self-destruction, the death drive

is deflected outwards onto others (GTC I 72–3). Fromm objects that this representation of the disposition to violence as a human constant is empirically false. As he learnt from his anthropologist friends Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, in some ‘primitive’ tribes, violence towards other humans is almost unknown. And from his own sociological studies in Germany, he knew that the destructive impulse is much stronger in the lower middle than in the upper classes (EF 180–1, SS 7).

His second objection to Freud is that instinct is not the sole, or even the main, determinant of character and drives: ‘Those urges which motivate social activities’, he wrote in 1936, are not, as Freud supposes, ‘sublimations of sexual instincts, but rather products of social processes’.⁵ The drives which human beings share with the animals, Fromm continues, can be summed up under the heading ‘self-preservation’. These are the same for everyone. That, however,

which make for *differences* in men’s characters, like love and hatred, the lust for power and the yearning for submission ... the most beautiful as well as the most ugly ... are not part of a fixed and biologically given human nature, but result from the social processes which create man. In other words, society has not only a suppressing function ... but it has also a creative function. Man’s nature, his passions and anxieties, are a cultural product.

(EF 10)

In part, this is an empirical claim: the ‘spirit’ of the Middle Ages is clearly different from that of the Renaissance, and that, in turn, is different from the spirit of monopoly capitalism. By ‘spirit’, Fromm refers to the ‘social character’ (EF 50) of those eras, that is, the character traits common to the majority of the inhabitants of the respective historical periods (EF 276). In part, however, it is a conceptual claim: the drive to fame and economic success, he suggests, did not exist in the (at least early) Middle Ages because the preconditions of such a drive did not exist (EF 11). This insightful point could have been expressed more strongly: in a non-individualistic society, the drive to fame *could* not have existed since, conceptually speaking, ‘I want to be famous’ presupposes, among other things, the existence of a unique ‘I’ (see further p. 213 below). In general, whether or not a drive makes sense depends on the social and technological conditions that obtain in a particular historical period: a medieval monk who said he wanted to be a futures trader would have been unintelligible to both his contemporaries and himself.

The ‘two great theorists of a dynamic science of man’ are, says Fromm, ‘Marx and Freud’ (EF xvii). But with such a wholesale rejection of Freud—all that really remains for Fromm is the idea that there are motivations below the level of consciousness that are often pathological, a notion that Freud actually took over from Schopenhauer—why not just settle for Marx? In *Escape from Freedom* (though not, I think, in later works), Fromm is indeed more indebted

to Marx than to Freud because he holds not merely that social conditions are the primary determination of drives and actions, but, more specifically, that the 'mode of life' that is determined by the underlying 'economic system' is the 'primary factor' in determining human feeling and motivation (EF16). This looks to be a version of Marx's 'superstructure' thesis: the thesis, as we have seen, that culture, in the broadest sense, is a 'superstructure' whose character is determined by the underlying economic 'base'. So, given this thesis, why is there any need for reference to psychology at all? Should we not simply abandon 'social psychology' and just attend to economics?

As John Rickert observes, the chief failing of Soviet—so-called 'vulgar'—Marxism was its neglect of the subjective factor in social phenomena. Karl Korsch, a 'Western' Marxist, noted in 1923 that following the German defeat in 1918, 'the organized political power of the bourgeoisie was smashed and outwardly there was nothing else in the way of the transition from capitalism to socialism'. Yet the revolution never happened. The 'great chance was never seized', Korsch added, 'because the *socio-psychological* preconditions ... were lacking'.⁶ The cultural superstructure within which action occurs, in other words, is not a direct function of the underlying economic order: different social psychologies can produce different responses to the same economic conditions.

The rise of the individual

Escape from Freedom is, then, a social-psychological study of the conditions—allegedly the same conditions—that produced Nazism in Germany and conformism in America. A methodological premiss of Fromm's discussion is, to borrow a phrase from biology, that 'phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny' (cf. SS 23), that developments in social psychology mirror those of individual psychology. The new-born child, observes Fromm, although a different organism, is 'functionally one' with the mother; it remains, as it were, umbilically connected. Since it has no consciousness of itself as an individual, it lacks freedom. On the other hand, it has an intense feeling of security. As the child develops, the 'primary ties' to the mother are severed. Consciousness of itself as distinct from the world emerges and with it freedom, the knowledge that it can and must choose how to act. Since, however, the enviroing world is not as accommodating as the mother, is indeed often actively hostile, and since it is very big and very powerful, there also emerge new feelings of 'aloneness', 'powerlessness', and 'anxiety'. This generates a drive to find a new form of 'submergence', to return to the absolute security of the womb. (Though Fromm rejects Freud's use of the 'death instinct' to explain violence and denies its intrinsic connection to sexuality, this is an acceptance of the reality of the death instinct, of, that is, the 'nirvana principle'.) The drive to submergence is, however, pathological: once individuality has emerged, it can never be properly

escaped. There is no return, a new form of security must be created, which accepts individuality as a fact (EF 21–30).

The rise of anxious individualism

The rise of individualism mirrors the rise of the individual. When humanity first arises from the womb of nature, the individual is nothing more than an organic part of the tribe or clan. Eventually, however, individual self-consciousness emerges and with it, the ‘ambiguous’ character of individuality. On the one hand, there is the blessing of freedom but on the other, the curse of insecurity and anxiety, an anxiety captured in the biblical narrative of expulsion from the garden of Eden, the loss of the ‘sweet bondage of paradise’ (EF 33). And so, on the social level, too, there emerges nostalgia for our lost paradise, the quest to ‘escape’ the freedom of individuality.

As his writings progress, Fromm’s dating of the rise of individualism as a societal form changes: in *The Art of Loving*, for instance, he dates it at around 1400 BCE (AL 48–9). In *Escape from Freedom*, however, it occurs in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. (I shall return to the significance of this variable dating later on.) *Escape from Freedom*’s account of the rise of individualism in—at least modern—Western history is heavily dependent on Jakob Burkhardt’s famous *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*: Part II of the book is entitled ‘The Development of the Individual’.

Individualism, as is revealed by the history of Italian art and philosophy, says Fromm, first emerged in fourteenth-century Italy. In the Middle Ages, individuals were tied to their social role within the feudal hierarchy. To move from one class to another was virtually unknown, as it was to move from the place of your birth. The social order was, however, not experienced as a tyrannical artifice but as an order of things ordained (as Edith Stein would put it) by both God and nature. Rooted in the social order, one never felt alone or insecure. Within the limits of one’s estate, one had a measure of what Fromm calls ‘positive’ freedom for ‘self-realisation’, self-expression: the painter painted *his* vision of the holy virgin, the cabinet maker *his* version of the chair. Freedom in the modern sense, the unrestricted ‘negative’ freedom to choose one’s way of life, was unknown. Yet one was not *deprived* of negative freedom: since the conception of the individual as distinct from his or her social role did not exist, there was no conception of a subject who could be thus deprived. There was, of course, a great deal of sickness and suffering in the Middle Ages, but the consolation for that was the certain existence of the loving God of Catholicism—a heavenly *father* together with the ‘all-embracing ... Virgin Mother’ (SS 54)—as opposed to the Protestant God of doubt and fear (EF 40–4).

The Renaissance began in the Northern Italian cities of Florence, Venice, and Siena, because, situated on international trading routes, that is where, in

the late Middle Ages, the capitalist bourgeoisie first appeared. Within the cities, the medieval social order began to break down—nobles and commoners began to intermingle and intermarry—and the medieval economic order began to break down as well.

For most of the Middle Ages, the price of products was determined by the craft guilds and competition among their members was discouraged. Commerce was conducted by a multitude of small merchants. Since there was usually no separation between wholesale and retail, traders dealt directly with customers: commerce was intimate and personal. Private property was regarded as necessary rather than desirable, communism was the ideal, and wealth was to be used for support of the poor. Since avarice was a sin, a theory of economic activity focused on profit would have been treated in the same way as a theory of sexual pleasure (an economic *Kama Sutra*). As R. H. Tawney puts it in his famous *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, in the medieval world, 'economic interest is subordinate to the real business of life, which is salvation' (EF 52). These, then, were, to use Habermas' language, the 'lifeworld norms' (GTC I 53–5) to which economic activity was subject. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, however, they began to break down. Some guild members began to accumulate capital, to employ increasing numbers of journeymen, and to lower prices to drive competitors out of business and achieve monopolies. Medieval cooperation gave way to increasingly savage competition: as Luther would later complain, the monopolists 'raise and lower prices as they please and oppress and ruin the small merchants, as the pike the little fishes in the water, just as though they were lords over God's creatures and free from all laws of faith and love'. A new spirit of restlessness emerged. Time became a valuable commodity: the clocks in Nuremberg began to chime the quarter-hours (EF 56–7).

Out of this meltdown of the medieval socioeconomic order grew the individual. Since there was now no longer a social hierarchy determining one's economic fate, one was free to—compelled to—forge one's own economic destiny. For the wealthy few, their situation in life was something to be celebrated in cultural artefacts devoted to their own glory. But for many, it was a time of increasing insecurity; one felt powerless in the face of the new market forces. The rise of the individual, of, that is, freedom, was an 'ambiguous' phenomenon, a mixed blessing: one was free of the 'chains' of the medieval order, but with the new freedom came 'a deep feeling of insecurity, powerlessness, doubt, aloneness, and anxiety', feelings that 'must be alleviated if the individual is to function successfully' (EF 62).

The Reformation 'answered' the psychological needs created by the new economic order by providing solutions to the anxiety it brought with it. The new religion of Lutheranism was not the religion of the wealthy upper classes who had created the culture of the Italian and later Northern Renaissance, but of the poor and relatively poor, especially the urban petit bourgeoisie. By dethroning

the authority of the Catholic Church, Lutheranism gave expression to the new feeling of freedom, while the doctrine of original sin, of a 'just' rather than loving God, and the denial of salvation by works, gave expression to the new sense of powerlessness and anxiety. At the same time, however, it provided a 'solution' to the new anxiety: only by acknowledging one's utter worthlessness and by an unconditional commitment to being God's 'instrument'—only, in other words, by renouncing one's just-won freedom—could one hope, undeserving though one be, to experience God's grace. Thus while Luther freed the faithful from the 'tyranny' of the Catholic Church, he did so only to demand their submission to an even more tyrannical and arbitrary authority. Surrender was the condition of being loved, a solution that prepared the way for the submission that would later be demanded by 'the leader' (EF 74–84).

Calvin, too, addressed the anxious lower middle class with the same kind of anti-humanism. Once again, he preached a tyrannical God with one's salvation or damnation entirely predetermined by his arbitrary decision. Although salvation could not be earned by good works, Calvinists indulged in a kind of cognitive dissonance to convince themselves that good works were a sign that one belonged to the 'elect' rather than the damned: the sense of one's own election combined with contempt for the non-elect prepared the way, suggests Fromm, for Nazi antisemitism. Envy and hostility towards the luxury of the wealthy upper classes (*ressentiment*, in Nietzsche's language) produced what Weber called the 'inner-worldly asceticism' of the Calvinist petit bourgeoisie, the 'protestant work-ethic': hard work plus the refusal to spend money on sinful pleasure was the sign of one's election—and also, of course, produced an accumulation of capital (EF 83–99).

The psychology of Nazism

The Reformation, says Fromm, produced a new kind of psychology, which he refers to as the 'authoritarian personality', a combination of sadism and masochism, drives which, contra Freud, have to do with relations of power rather than sexual relations as such. Luther's power over the masses lay in the fact that he shared this personality with them. On the one hand, he was driven to submit himself to the authority of a tyrannical God, while on the other, to dominate the 'rabble' whom he despised (EF 66). This same 'sado-masochistic' craving for both submission and power was shared by Hitler and the German petit bourgeois who constituted his 'base'. Frightened, powerless, and alone in the economic collapse of the 1920s, the masses sought to recreate the 'primary ties' of childhood by abandoning individuality and merging into a mass of millions united by shared submission to the 'leader'. At the same time, they were able to exercise the sadistic will to power, both collectively through Germany's military might and individually as petty-minded, anti-Semitic minor officials (EF 204–37). Fromm does not put it in quite these terms, but the burden of his argument is that for the German lower middle class, Hitler became a secular

god: with the decline of organised religion, the authoritarian personality created by the Reformation needed to find a substitute.

American conformism

Flight from freedom is not, Fromm asserts, an exclusively German phenomenon. We (we Americans), too, have our own version of it. Reduced to atomised ‘cogs’ in the bureaucratised machinery of the modern, rationalised economy, we feel ‘powerless and alone, anxious and insecure’ (EF 238). And so we have our own form of escape: we become conformist automatons with a social ‘pseudo-self’ determined by approved cultural patterns. This is something our culture encourages. We are encouraged to acquire a ‘pleasant personality’ because that is good for business: the Howard Johnson restaurant business deploys fake customers to check that the server has turned on exactly the right degree of the plastic smile. Education suppresses spontaneity, sexual prurience inhibits sexual self-expression, advertising manufactures desire, and so on. Under the illusion of being a ‘self-willed individual, modern man thinks, feels, and wills what he believes he is supposed to think feel and will’ (EF 253).

What is the solution to modernity’s loss of security?

According to Fromm’s narrative, then, yearning for the security which, as individuals we experienced in early childhood and as a civilisation experienced in our medieval past, we seek to escape the freedom of being genuine individuals: in Germany, by surrendering it to Hitler, in the Western democracies, by surrendering it to approved socioeconomic patterns. But this, he says, can never be a successful strategy: individuality can never be truly obliterated, the ‘primary ties’ are gone and lost forever. How then are we to overcome anxiety?

Fromm’s answer to this question is rather brief. We must, he says, embrace freedom. Although capitalism has been responsible for the isolation and alienation of modern humanity, at the same time, through productive efficiency, it has provided us with the material base for ‘self-realisation’ and has thus contributed to the growth of ‘positive freedom’ (EF 107).

What is self-realisation? Every individual, indeed every organic being, has a ‘nucleus that is peculiar for this one person and only for him’. Unimpeded life is the unfolding of this ‘nucleus’: it consists, in other words, in ‘growth’. That is the ‘meaning of life’: ‘the meaning of life is the act of living itself’, where ‘living’ consists in escape from the socially imposed ‘pseudo-self’ and unfolding one’s unique nucleus in spontaneous, creative activity (EF 261–2).

Why should this resolve the problem of anxiety, provide a new and authentic security? Fromm never says. The only hint of an answer comes right at the beginning of the book where he says that after man becomes an ‘individual’,

he has no choice but to unite himself with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work or else seek a [an unsatisfactory] kind of security by such ties to the world that destroy his freedom and the integrity of his individual self.

(EF 20)

As to why love and work should be capable of restoring the security that has been missing from Western civilisation since the birth of the modern age, Fromm does not say. That task is reserved for his subsequent books, *Man for Himself*, *The Sane Society*, and *The Art of Loving*.

Reservations

An Asymmetry in the Narrative. Fromm's narrative theme, as we have seen, is that, in the attempt to recover the psychological security that disappeared with the rise of capitalism, we modern individuals have a pathological disposition to 'escape' the freedom that comes with individuality. As presented, however, the discussion of the failure of individualism in American society is not a discussion of a motivated *flight* from freedom but rather of the *removal* of freedom by modern, rationalised, bureaucratised industrial capitalism, which reduces us to, almost compels us to become, 'cog[s] in the vast economic machine' (EF 109) (see further p. 219 below). Fromm says that the 'isolation and powerlessness of the individual in our era' leads, if not to the authoritarian character, then to 'a compulsive conforming to the processes by which the isolated individual becomes an automaton' (EF 239–40). But this makes little sense: if we are *already* reduced to automatons, then we cannot have an inner 'compulsion' to *become* automatons. It is true that, as Fromm sees it, in order to become flourishing individuals, the same task stands before both Germans and Americans: the task of achieving both negative and positive freedom. But while, for the Germans, freedom requires the overcoming of an *internal*, psychological constraint, for the Americans, it requires the overcoming of an *external*, socio-economic constraint.

The question of critical potential. Fromm's former Frankfurt colleagues accused him, we saw, of turning the human personality into a cultural product, thereby giving up on the revolutionary potential in orthodox Freudianism (p. 210 above). *Escape from Freedom* certainly provides some evidence of this 'Americanisation' of a former German Marxist into an unthreatening kind of bourgeois thinker. He states flatly at the beginning of the book, as we saw, that 'Man's nature, his passions and anxieties, are a cultural product', following an equally flat assertion in an earlier paper that our motives for social action are 'not the sublimation of sexual instincts' but rather the 'products of social processes' (p. 204 above). By the end of the book, however, he has he has changed his mind:

[A]lthough there is no biologically fixed human nature, human nature has a dynamism of its own that constitutes an active force in the evolution of the social process.

Even if we are not yet able to state clearly in psychological terms what the exact nature of this human dynamism is ... we must not succumb to ... the sociological relativism in which man is nothing but a puppet, directed by the strings of social circumstances.

(EF 287)

By the end of the book, then, he sees the need not to reduce the self to a mere social construction—sees, in other words, the force of the Frankfurt criticism—even though he is not yet clear as to how to avoid this. This defines for him the primary task for his future work.

Section II: *Man for Himself*

Escape from Freedom was followed, in 1947, by *Man for Himself*, which Fromm describes as, ‘in many respects’, a continuation of its predecessor. The respect in which it is not a continuation is that it propounds an ethics that is, at best, only implicit in the predecessor.

The problem

‘Modern man’, says Fromm, lacks an objective ethics. He has lapsed into ethical relativism. Ethics has been reduced to a matter of taste, as variable as any other matter of taste. This is a bad state of affairs, not only because it renders us anxious and uneasy but also because it makes us defenceless against the blandishments of ‘magical’ figures such as Hitler (MFH 5).

The collapse of ethical objectivism is due to the death of God. As Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor famously claims, ‘if God is dead all things are permitted’ (MFH 248). Religious ethics were ‘authoritarian’: there was, in fact, nothing wrong with Adam’s eating the apple other than that it disobeyed God’s groundless command not to do so. To accept such an ethics is to submit to tyranny: God’s unworthy motive, Fromm suggests, would have been to prevent Adam acquiring the knowledge that would have made him ‘one of Us’ (MFH 12). Authoritarian ethics is thus anti-human. And so we need to discover an objective, universal ethics grounded in something other than the arbitrary command of an authority. It can be discovered, Fromm asserts, in the nature of humanity itself.

Humanistic ethics

The goal of ethics is human flourishing or ‘happiness’—though Fromm warns that happiness is best achieved not by aiming directly at it but as the epiphenomenon of creative activity (MFH 27). (This is sometimes called the ‘paradox of happiness’, the fact that people who exercise their constitutional right to the ‘pursuit’ of happiness tend to end up less happy than those who allow it to arrive through

absorption in activity directed towards something other than happiness.) According to humanistic ethics, promotion of human 'welfare' is the sole criterion for distinguishing between good and evil. There is, says Fromm, nothing higher or more dignified than flourishing human existence (MFH 12-13): there is, for example, no divine plan that is to be realised through human 'instruments' (MFH 134).

How is one to determine what does and does not promote human 'welfare'? According to humanistic ethics, only humanity itself can determine an answer: there is no omniscient God who knows better than us what is in our true interest. 'Man is the measure', he says (MFH 13), draining the Sophist slogan of the pejorative meaning given to it by Plato. But how are we to do the 'measuring'?

Humanistic ethics is a science: the science of how to live well, how to flourish. Like every other science, it aims to produce objective and universal principles of human flourishing—objective but, like the principles of every other science, not 'absolute', always open to revision in light of new knowledge (MFH 16). Since flourishing is, first and foremost, a psychological matter, the experts in the science of happiness are psychologists, more specifically, psychoanalysts. Many of the great ethical treatises of the past are also essays in psychology (but not all, a matter to which I shall return): those of Aristotle, Spinoza, and Dewey, for instance. As Aristotle says, just as the doctor who aims at health of the body must understand the body, so the ethicist who aims at health of the soul 'must know somehow the facts about the soul' (MFH 25).

Human nature

If there is to be a 'science of man', there must be such an entity as 'man', an invariant human nature. If ethics is to produce objective, universal principles, there must be a universal, ahistorical, and transcultural nature that we all have. Given the passages in *Escape from Freedom* emphasising the self as a social construct, one might expect Fromm to deny the existence of such an entity. But—clearly aware by now of the force of the Frankfurt criticism—*Man for Himself* insists that there really is an invariant human nature. The pre-social individual is not, he says, a 'blank sheet of paper on which culture writes its text' (MFH 23). If he were, 'man would end up [as the Frankfurters claim] a puppet of social arrangements' (MFH 21). The human individual is inevitably socialised, of course, and in the process adapts to its society. But the collision between the social and the innate qualities of the individual (which Freud describes as the confrontation between the 'reality' and 'pleasure' principles) inevitably produces subjective effects. A sexually repressive society, for instance, produces neurosis, and sooner or later rebellion (MFH 22-3).

The 'productive' character

What, then, is this innate human nature? Fromm answers in the course of providing an account of the well-turned-out individual, the 'good man'. In the age

of religion and even in the post-religious nineteenth century, public discourse was full of accounts of the good man. Modern thought, however, has become exclusively critical and this, the absence of a model of a good, or even 'better', man has paralysed our faith in ourselves and our future (MFH 82). (This is likely a criticism of Horkheimer and Adorno's insistence on a purely 'negative dialectic', a purely 'negative' engagement with modernity.) Freud gestured towards such a model with his account of the mature individual as someone who had progressed through the 'oral', to the 'anal', and thence to the 'genital' stage of development (and of the stunted individual as one whose psychic development had halted at one of the earlier stages). Fromm's own conception of the fully flourishing individual as possessing a 'productive character' is, he says, inspired by a desexualised version of the 'genital' (MFH 36–7).

Flourishing life, human and non-human alike, is growth. As a mature tree realises the potentialities contained in the seed, so the flourishing, productive individual realises its potentialities, its 'powers'. Although the 'human situation' is common to all individuals—the 'homelessness' consequent on our separation from nature by self-consciousness (pp. 217–18 below)—each of us, indeed each organism, is also unique, possessed of a unique set of powers, just as we all possess a unique set of fingerprints (MFH 20). As Aristotle saw, the good, virtuous individual is one who cultivates this unique essence. Virtue is self-realisation. The productive personality—unlike the 'authoritarian', 'exploitative', 'hoarding', or '[self]-marketing' personality—is creative: one paradigm is the artist. The virtuous individual is also loving, because only in human 'solidarity'—only, as Hegel would put it, by belonging to a 'we' that is at the same time an 'I'—can we genuinely recover from the isolation of individuality created by self-consciousness (MFH 101) (I shall return to this claim shortly). Productiveness is essentially rational, because one needs reason to discover both what one's unique powers are and how to realise them. Reason, however, productive thinking, is more than intelligence. While the merely intelligent person is good at quickly and accurately deducing conclusions from premises, the productive thinker penetrates to the essence of things and so to new conceptions of reality (MFH 27). It is, in other words, reason that enables us to go beneath the manifest image and generate the scientific image of reality, to generate the sciences such as, for example, psychoanalysis (SS 22).

Destructiveness

A socio-political thinker, we have seen Carl Schmitt claiming, must choose a fundamental anthropology: one must decide either that 'man is evil' or that 'man is good'. Like Schmitt—but unlike Buber (p. 168 above)—Fromm thinks that the choice is a binary one, and so he opts for the second alternative. Either, he thinks, one must side with Luther and Calvin (and Freud) and hold that the human being is innately, 'originally', sinful, or else with Socrates who held that no one wills to perform evil (MFH 211). And so he sides with Socrates,

except that while Socrates takes ignorance to be the source of evil, Fromm (like Rousseau) attributes it to social circumstances. Of course, he says, if the productive drive, 'life's tendency to grow', is blocked, then the repressed energy will express itself in destructive ways: 'the life-destructive forces in a person occur in inverse ratio to the life-furthering ones; the stronger the one, the weaker the other' (MFH 216–17). Given, then, enlightened social and parental upbringing, the human individual will turn out to be a social, benevolent being. This is Fromm's response to the charge that an ethics of self-realisation is an ethics of 'egotism or selfishness'. A person who is able to develop all their natural potentialities will be a loving person. As Nietzsche saw, selfishness is not the product of acting on one's natural inclinations but rather the opposite, the product of a society that stunts the natural development of the individual. Selfishness is a socially induced neurosis (MFH 118–31).

It is relevant to note that Dr Benjamin Spock's generation-defining *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* appeared in 1946, a work that, in teaching parents to avoid imposing excessive control over their children, drew heavily on *Escape from Freedom's* account of the 'authoritarian personality' (pp. 208–9 above).⁷ (Fromm and Spock must have been personally acquainted since both were peace activists and both were members of the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy.) Attacked by conservatives as excessively 'permissive', Spock's book was the bible on the basis of which both the peace-and-love 'flower children' and the student revolutionaries of the 1960s were raised. And so Fromm, too, made his contribution to the ferment of the 1960s.

Reservations

Conflict. Fromm appears to believe that repression is the sole cause of destructiveness, that human conflict is always the result of neurosis on the side of one or both parties. In a society of properly nurtured, happy, creative, loving people, conflict would disappear—resulting, presumably, in the Marxist end of history, the withering away of the state. But the assumption that conflict is always the result of neurosis is surely false. Fully healthy, loving, 'productive' people can come into conflict about all sorts of things: the ownership of land, the fair distribution of material goods, liberty versus equality, and so on. Or they can fall in love with the same person. (Fromm might reply that true love is free love, but Paul and Hannah Tillich's biography [p. 119 above] suggests that to be a chimera.)

What is missing from Fromm's social thought is an account of conflict resolution that does not assume the conflict to be a product of neurosis. What is missing, more particularly, is something like Buber's notion of dialogue as a matter of responding to the other with one's 'whole'—healthy—person combined with Habermas' methodology of justice, his account of the securing of just reconciliations between competing interests through 'communicative

rationality' (p. 153 above). It is notable that while *Man for Himself* presents itself as offering a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, of the traditional virtues, only 'love' appears in Fromm's index. 'Justice' makes no appearance at all.

Humanism. Fromm is a self-confessed 'humanist' in exactly Heidegger's pejorative sense of the word (GTC I 247): he is a human chauvinist who, as we have seen, emphatically asserts that nothing has value beyond human welfare. He quotes Calvin (together with Luther his principal bete noire) as saying that because 'we are not our own', our 'will' (and therefore our own welfare) 'should not predominate in our discussions' (MFH 119). Because we are innately sinful, Calvin believes, we must prostrate ourselves before a higher and better will, turn ourselves into God's 'instruments' unworthy though we be. Thinking as always in binary terms, Fromm believes that his own 'humanistic ethics' is the only alternative to this personality-crippling religious anti-humanism. Even on his own showing, however, this binary opposition is ripe for deconstruction: *Escape from Freedom's* account of medieval Catholicism, of a benevolent God filled with care for a flawed but still loveable humanity (p. 206 above), is an account of an outlook on life that, while recognising a supra-human will as the source of the highest value, is still not anti-humanist.

What, of course, to modern eyes, is so glaring about Fromm's human chauvinism is its exclusion of a genuine environmental ethics, of an ethics of care for non-human nature that is not based on the idea that conservation sometimes serves human interests. Heidegger, however, makes a deeper point about humanism. Though it seeks to value and extol the unique value and dignity of the human being, humanism, he says, does not set the 'dignity', the '*humanitas*', of the human being 'high enough' (PM 251–2). To be genuinely alive to the fullness of being, he argues (together with Scheler [GTC II 161–2] and Tillich [pp. 127–30 above]), is to comprehend one's task of stewardship, the task of aligning and subordinating one's own will to the 'will' of nature (pp. 127–30, 193 below). From a Heideggerian point of view, enlightened human beings 'productively' love not just other human beings but rather 'being' as such. Fromm has the positivist's blindness to the possibility of (indeed, I would argue, need for) commitment to a humanity-transcending cause. Since there is no God, he thinks, 'as long as anyone believes that his ideal and purpose is outside him, that it is above the clouds ... he will go outside himself and seek fulfilment where it cannot be found' (MFH 248). Despite his early immersion in Hassidic culture, Fromm misses the fact that God can appear in forms other than those of misanthropic Protestant metaphysics.

Section III: *The Sane Society*

Published in 1955, *The Sane Society* is, says Fromm's foreword, a 'continuation' of *Escape from Freedom* and a 'development' of *Man for Himself's*, as he now calls it, 'humanistic psychoanalysis'. What he does, we shall see, is to greatly

expand on the 'human situation' that gives rise to the specific needs constitutive of 'human nature'. I shall integrate into the following discussion elements from *The Art of Loving*, which he published in the following year.

The question

Mainstream psychologists, says Fromm, assume that mental health is a matter of being 'well adjusted', adjusted to the norms of one's society. But what if those norms are themselves sources of mental disease (as 'queer theory' claims to be true of the modern mainstream)? Consider, once again, a Calvinist community, a community that inculcates in the believer a profound sense of sinfulness, anxiety, and powerlessness. A Calvinist society is thus, asserts Fromm, an 'insane' society, a society that produces mentally diseased individuals. Within Calvinism, of course, feeling sinful, anxious, and powerless is how one is *supposed* to feel, so that within the community, one does not feel isolated or excluded: societies that inculcate mental disease, notes Fromm, always also provide 'opiates', not for overcoming it, but for dulling the suffering that it creates. For this reason, Fromm draws a distinction between 'neurosis' and 'defect'. Calvinist individuals are not neurotic, given that they function effectively within the community, but they are damaged, 'defective' (SS 50).

The question raised in the title of Fromm's book is: Do we live in a 'sane' society or, like the Calvinists, in an 'insane' one? Does modern, Western, and in particular American society produce healthy or mentally 'defective' individuals? The signs are not promising. That we are constantly at war, that we produce weapons that threaten the very existence of our species, that boredom is widespread, that statistics show that the wealthier a country, the higher its rate of alcoholism, drug addiction, and suicide, suggest that modern Western culture fails the sanity test. Fromm sets out to confirm this initial impression, to diagnose its cause, and to offer something in the way of a remedy.

The pathology of normality

To evaluate an entire society as either 'sane' or 'insane' implies the existence of universal, trans-social criteria of mental health valid for human beings as such. Mainstream social scientists, observes Fromm, deny (as he himself did, early in his career) that there are such criteria. Personality, they hold, is a social construction: 'man's mental constitution is a blank piece of paper on which society and culture write their text, and which has no intrinsic quality of its own' (SS 13). This is what Fromm now even more emphatically denies: according to his 'humanistic psychology', or alternatively 'normative humanism', there is a universal human nature, a set of needs common to all human beings. A given society is sane to the extent that a 'normal' person within it finds these needs satisfied, insane to the extent he or she does not. Otherwise expressed, a sane society is one in which a person who counts as normal within

it possesses full 'integrity', an insane one, one in which he or she is 'defective'. There must, claims Fromm, be this 'core' human nature common to the whole human race, otherwise there would be no history: history, historical change, is the result of rebellion against social orders that frustrate fundamental human nature (SS 13).

The matriarchy and the patriarchy

Human nature, universal human needs, are, says Fromm, the product of the 'human situation'. Our prehistoric ancestors, says Fromm, did not think of themselves as different from the animals (AL 11), did not experience themselves as human in the modern sense. Though the hunter-gatherers were, like the higher animals, capable of practical thought, they did not have self-consciousness, did not have a conception of themselves as subjects of consciousness distinct from the world as an object of consciousness. This order of things was 'matriarchal': all had emerged from the 'womb' of nature, all were 'children' of mother nature rooted in, and bound to, 'blood and soil'. Within the matriarchy, one was profoundly secure: since one did not experience oneself as an individual, danger, death, and anxiety were unknown (SS 43–57).

Around 1400 BCE (SS 48–9) the 'patriarchal' principle emerged:⁸ for the first time, man became conscious of himself as an individual separated from nature. Possessing reason and imagination, he became aware of his own death. The loss of the matriarchy was a source of profound sorrow. 'When man is born'—note the identification of 'man' with 'patriarchal' man—

he is thrown ... into a situation which is indefinite, uncertain, and open. There is certainty about the past—and about the future ... death.

(SS 24)

As is recorded in Genesis, man experienced himself as expelled from paradise on account of the distinctive human attributes of reason and knowledge. He experiences himself as a 'homeless' wanderer, an experience expressed in the Odysseus and Faust myths (SS 51, MFH 39–41). But as patriarchal, man knows that he must use his capacity for reason, discipline, and law to create a new human home to replace the lost home of nature. Return to the matriarchy is prohibited: the universal incest taboo is not, as Freud thought, a sexual matter. Rather, it is a symbolic prohibition of return to the matriarchy, a demand that we move onwards and upwards to a new form of at-homeness (SS 39).

This is our legacy and our existential situation. The product of our matriarchal and patriarchal past, we humans are born into a 'polarity' (SS 26–7). On the one hand, we have the life-affirming patriarchal drive to liberate ourselves from bondage to the womb of nature, a drive to freedom and creativity, but on the other, we experience our birth as something 'negative', as our having been 'thrown into a world without one's knowledge or consent' (SS 36), thrown into

the problem of overcoming the anxiety of mortality. This dialectical situation is what Freud was getting at in his own way in his later work by identifying the two fundamental human drives as Eros and Thanatos, the drive to live and generate within one's social world on the one hand, and the drive to return to the tension-less tranquillity of the womb on the other (SS 26). The existential problem common to all human beings is, then, that of finding a synthesis between freedom and security, a form of life in which both drives are satisfied.

Nationalism

The rise of the individual is, says Fromm, irreversible. Any genuine solution to the problem must acknowledge this: must, that is, produce a synthesis between individuality and belonging, freedom and at-homeness, that preserves both elements. In the Hegelian language Fromm sometimes uses (SS 59–60), a genuine solution must consist in becoming an 'I' that is also a 'we', in belonging to a 'we' that does not eradicate the 'I'. It follows that solutions to the existential problem which satisfy only one of the two drives are fake solutions. One fake solution, to which I shall return shortly, is conformism, the disappearance of the genuine self into a socially patterned cliché. Another more dangerous attempt at the same elimination of the 'I' is nationalism—dangerous because it produces aggression and racism.

Fromm's account of nationalism is a redescription of the 'authoritarian personality' (pp. 208–9 above). Nationalism, he says, is a cancellation of the 'incest taboo', an attempted return to the matriarchy, to 'blood and soil'. In the language of Fromm's first book, it is an 'escape from freedom', from the freedom of being a self-determining individual. Patriotism, he continues, is nothing but the cult of nationalism. It warps one's attitude to the stranger and produces war, racism, and xenophobia. The idea that patriotism is a form of love is mistaken: love of nation which excludes love of all humanity is no more love than is love of an individual that excludes love of humanity (see pp. 223–4 below). Only when nationalism is transformed into 'universal brotherliness' will man 'have found a new form of rootedness' and 'transformed his world into a truly human home' (SS 56–8).

The capitalist condition

And so we come to *The Sane Society's* ultimate concern: we ourselves, we inhabitants of modern Western capitalism. Unlike earlier societies in which work was regarded as a tiresome necessity to be performed as little as possible,⁹ industrial society presupposes a population eager to work. And so work has to become an inner drive, part of the 'social character' of a modern population. The nineteenth century saw capitalism at its most vicious: the mutual care and responsibility of the Middle Ages collapsed into an unconstrained drive for

profit that reduced the working class to poverty and misery. The social character instilled into (at least the middle-class) individual was Freud's 'anal' character, a character marked by coldness, anxiety, competitiveness, and hoarding.

With the rise of labour regulation and the welfare state in the twentieth century, the character of capitalism has changed. Working hours have become more humane, poverty has been almost completely eliminated, and so, as a society, we seem to be much more 'sane'. But actually, in terms of satisfying the basic human drives, we are even less sane than the nineteenth century. Although the visible authority of the top-hatted, cigar-smoking capitalist boss has disappeared, it has been replaced by the anonymous, Kafkaesque authority of a vast, bureaucratised system. We are not so much wage-'slaves' as 'robots' (SS 99) who perform meaningless microtasks either on the assembly line on the factory floor or in the office above. Towards each other, we display a 'superficial friendliness', but beneath the surface, we regard our fellow 'robots' with 'distance and indifference' and also 'a good deal of subtle distrust' (SS 135). And so we have become 'alienated' from each other: the *Gemeinschaft* (community) of medieval society in which we found a solidarity and security to replace the lost security of the matriarchy has been replaced by a *Gesellschaft* (society) that reduces us to 'atoms ... little particles estranged from each other but held together by selfish interests and by the necessity to make use of each other' (ibid.). In modern capitalism we find no security. But neither do we find anything more than a formal veneer of freedom. Genuine freedom of the individual is destroyed by the requirement to develop a 'pleasant', 'winning' personality that we can 'market': like the Howard Johnson waitress (p. 209 above), one needs to project oneself as a friendly, cooperative 'team player' (SS 137, MFH 69). We lose touch with our real selves: as a self-marketer, 'I am', in Pirandello's words, 'as you desire me' (SS 61). And so there is no genuine freedom to do what the real self wants. Modern capitalism thus denies both our fundamental drives: by 'alienating' us from each other, it denies us solidarity and security, while by 'alienating' us from our real selves, it denies us freedom (SS 76–146). We live, as it were, in the worst of all possible worlds.

Saving the self

Leaving aside for the moment the condition of modern society in general, how, as individuals, can we achieve the freedom and the security that is required by our mental health? In a word, through love and work. First of all, love. Only through love, loving community, can one find 'a new human form of rootedness', a 'truly human home' (p. 218 above) that will make up for the irrecoverable loss of our 'natural roots' (SS 37) in mother earth. Only through mutual care, responsibility, and respect for the individuality of both oneself and the others does one recover the lost security of the past without engaging in the futile and dangerous attempt to lose one's individuality: 'Only if [man]

can relate himself to others in a loving way does he feel one with them and at the same time preserving his integrity' as an individual (SS 66). Similarly, only through productive work, intense, absorbing, creative, 'generative' work, does one 'relate himself to nature, becoming one with her, and yet not submerging in her' (*ibid.*). I shall attend to this somewhat obscure claim about work shortly.

Saving society

Modern industrial capitalism, to repeat, atomises society and thus (unless we resist very hard) deprives us of the solidarity of loving brotherhood. And it disciplines us into robotic work and plastic personalities that deprive us of the freedom of self-realisation. It constitutes, in short, a pathological normality so that to count as 'normal' in the modern West is to be 'defective'. And so, to transform our 'insane' society into a 'sane' one there needs to be a fundamental change in its economic structure.

Drawing on the utopian tradition that embraces Robert Owen, the Mennonites, and the Israeli kibbutzim, Fromm calls the transformative social change that is required, a change to 'communitarian socialism' (SS 275–8). Unlike the Marxists, he does not think that the 'principal point' is the ownership of the means of production. State nationalisation of basic industries would simply replace one anonymous and oppressive employer with another (SS 321). The focus of change should rather be on transforming the work experience. The principle change that is required is the reduction of large enterprises into smaller units that are 'directly managed' by the workers. This will remove the sense of oppression that comes from being no more than a productive unit controlled by an anonymous owner and provide meaningful engagement in the productive process. Fromm considers the objection that a great deal of work will still remain boring, repetitious drudgery and that therefore, the transformation of the economic order will have to wait until machines can take over at least all the robotic elements in the productive process. But for two reasons, he thinks that this is a bad idea. First (his own version of the 'Protestant work ethic'), we need work to prevent boredom (SS 282). Second, what makes work drudgery is not, in fact, its repetitious character but rather the social context in which it is performed: the housewife and the maid both perform the same tasks but only for the latter is the work drudgery (SS 293–4). For the sake, perhaps, of his American audience, Fromm does not emphasise this point, but the difference between the housewife and the maid is that, with her husband, the housewife is a co-owner of the household. Thus, although he does not consider the abolition of the structure of capitalism sufficient for the arrival of the new economic order, he does appear to consider it necessary. Fromm's conception of socialism is close to Buber's 'religious socialism' (pp. 154–7 above). But it also seems to be close to the anarcho-syndicalism defended, *inter alia*, by Noam Chomsky. This is likely the reason Chomsky praises Fromm for his

‘wisdom, compassion, learning and insight into the problems of individuals trapped in a social world that is needlessly cruel and hostile’.¹⁰

Reservations

The Sane Society I take to represent Fromm’s completed philosophy. *The Art of Loving* does no more than elaborate its conception of love, while *To Have or to Be?* seems to me to belong to the literature of spiritual self-help rather than that of philosophy (in spite of the fact that Fromm views the prevalence of self-help books as a sign of the excessive passivity of the social character of modernity [MFH 80]). I have a number of criticisms to make of *The Sane Society*, but let me first acknowledge something important Fromm gets right: whether or not they belong to a universal human nature—that depends on the ultimately arbitrary matter of what one defines as the first appearance of ‘man’—we modern individuals do have a drive to both (negative and positive) freedom and to security, security in the face, ultimately, of death. These drives are, moreover, in tension with each other. I turn now to more critical remarks.

Dating the appearance of ‘man’. ‘Man’, universal human nature, is defined by Fromm as the ‘polarity’ between the drive for security and the drive for freedom (p. 217 above). When, however, did ‘man’, understood as the bearer of this ‘existential’ problem, first appear? Were one to read only *Escape from Freedom*, one would have the impression that ‘man’ is an abbreviation of ‘modern man’ and that he first arrived with the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. As one reads further into Fromm’s work, however, a different view appears: ‘man’ first arises with the transition from the matriarchy to the patriarchy. Sometimes this is said to have occurred around 1400 BCE (p. 217 above) and sometimes at the time of the writing of Genesis (possibly the sixth century BCE), although given that it is the appearance of self-consciousness that creates the problem of security (ibid.), one might think that the event really happened eons before the beginning of recorded history. But in any case, Fromm’s later view is that the appearance of ‘man’ happened thousands of years before the Renaissance.

While this looks like a contradiction—or at least a development in Fromm’s thinking—there is, I think, no contradiction. Although he is not explicit about it, I think that his view is—or at least ought to be—that while the existential problem of combining freedom with security began in prehistory, it found a kind of *satisfaction* in the Middle Ages. The ‘solidarity’ of the medieval social order represented a ‘solution’ to the existential problem by providing a *substitute* for the lost matriarchy, a solution which disappeared with the arrival of the Renaissance. It did not, of course, in Fromm’s view, provide a *final* solution to the problem since, while it provided for a kind of freedom in the form of self-expression within one’s social role (p. 206 above), it did not allow for freedom in the full-blown modern sense, the freedom of self-creation (pp. 209–10

above). For that to arrive, further historical development was necessary. Yet it was *a* solution, and its disappearance in early modernity was a traumatic loss from which we have still to recover.

This narrative has the virtue of rendering Fromm's position consistent. What needs to be observed, however, is that it represents a less radical position than the position he at least wished to present in *Escape from Freedom*. That position appeared to be a version of the Marxist thesis that culture is always a 'superstructure' resting on, caused by, an economic infrastructure: the arrival of capitalism generated, *for the first time*, the insecurity of 'man'. On the later account, however, the cause of that insecurity is not capitalism but a universal 'human situation' rooted in the fact of self-consciousness. It is noteworthy that the phrase 'human situation' never occurs in *Escape from Freedom*. While this is not, per se, a criticism of Fromm, it does lend support to the Frankfurters' charge that his integration into American society caused a de-radicalisation, the transition from a Marxist to a bourgeois mode of thought.

Individualism. The following argument runs through *The Sane Society*: The 'direction' of Western history, Fromm claims, is towards 'the full experience of individuality' and freedom (SS 60). This is a direction that he endorses via his version of the 'phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny' thesis (p. 205 above). The development of the individual from childhood to full maturity requires separation from the mother. Any interruption to this process—getting stuck in the 'oral' or 'anal' so that one fails to reach the 'genital' stage—is pathological. Similarly, the maturing of humanity, the emergence from the 'matriarchy' into the 'patriarchy', is a healthy, valuable process. Any interruption or regression, as happens with the authoritarian personality, is pathological. Admittedly, this valuable development brings with it the problem of security, of recovering within a patriarchal order the security humanity once experienced in the matriarchy, but this can be solved through love and productive work.

What are we to make of this? The first peculiarity is that although the 'direction' of history is said to be towards the embrace of individuality, Fromm acknowledges—as, given his account of life under capitalism, he must—that 'only a minority achieve the experience of the "I"'. For the majority, individualism is a mere façade behind which is hidden 'the failure to acquire an individual sense of identity' (SS 60). Given the routinised conformism of American life, only a few (one might suspect that he has in mind highly educated, originally European social critics such as himself) achieve real as opposed to formal individualism. But why then should we accept the claim about the 'direction' of history? Surely the truth about the direction that he charts is more like the opposite of what he claims it to be. The answer, however, is that the claim about 'direction' is not a descriptive but rather a normative one: as the child *ought* to separate from the mother, so humanity *ought* to replace the matriarchy with the patriarchy, and society *ought* to be a society in which everyone has 'the full experience of individuality'. Only then will man be 'fully born ... fully human' (SS 346).

What is it to 'be an individual'? For Fromm, it is to be self-creating, to create one's own 'identity' and not define oneself in terms of any social role. To say 'I am an American' or 'I am a Protestant' is a betrayal of individuality, a 'substitut[e]', for a 'truly individual sense of identity' (SS 60). But why exactly is a role-independent identity better than a role-dependent one? Fromm provides no answer so that one suspects, once again, a too uncritical assimilation to, not the reality, but rather the ideology of American life.

This brings me to the question of Fromm's account of post-matriarchal human nature. We do, I have accepted, have the drives to both freedom and security, drives that are in tension with each other. But Fromm ignores what I would claim to be another fundamental drive: the drive, as the phrase has it, to 'make a contribution', to leave the world—or a corner of it—a better place than one found it. We need commitment to something that transcends our individual well-being, need to think of ourselves as contributing to a general good. That Fromm does not see this is the reason his discussion of nationalism and patriotism (p. 218 above) is one-sided. There is, of course, as he says, a vicious kind of nationalism, and patriotism is often, as Dr Johnson observed, the last refuge of the scoundrel. Yet there is also a virtuous kind of nationalism and patriotism, a nationalism based on love of one's own rather than hatred of the other. Fromm, of course, thinks that one cannot love anyone unless one loves everyone (p. 218 above) so that the only 'nation' he thinks one can genuinely love is the nation of 'universal brotherhood'. To the mistakenness of this account of love I now turn.

The Nature of Love. If I 'truly love' one person, claims Fromm, 'I love all persons' (AL 46). Since this would require the lover to love Hitler, the claim seems to me problematic. He offers, however, three arguments—of uneven quality—in its support.

The first argument has to do with love as a disposition. Love, says Fromm, is not primarily a relation to a particular person but rather 'an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole' (AL 36). Since love is an attitude or disposition, it can, in principle, be activated by anyone. Hence, if one truly loves anyone, one is at least disposed to love—has a loving attitude towards—everyone. The argument, here, has to do with the nature of dispositions. The doorbell is disposed to ring, and will do so if pressed by anyone. But not all dispositions are activator-indifferent. The car is disposed to start if a key is inserted in the ignition: but not just any key. Love does indeed require a loving disposition. But it is a mistake to assume that all dispositions are activator-indifferent.

Fromm's second argument is as follows. If, he writes, 'a person loves only one other person and is indifferent to the rest of his fellow men, his love is not love but a symbiotic attachment, or an enlarged egoism' (AL 46). The difficulty with this argument is that loving one person and loving everyone are not exclusive alternatives: one can avoid the charge of engaging in an *egotism à deux*

(SS 193) by loving some or even many people, while there remain many other people one has no disposition to love at all. Can one love several people and be 'indifferent' to the rest? Emotionally speaking, one can and must: the idea of *loving* all the anonymous passengers on the underground train makes no sense. Fromm thinks we can 'love' all human beings because he assimilates all moral attitudes to love. One of those attitudes is duty. It is perfectly true that if one of the other passengers on the train has a heart attack, one will do what one can for them. But, of course, one does so not out of love but rather duty. Another moral attitude is respect. It is true that one does not simply remove the occupant of the seat one wants as one might remove a pile of old newspapers. But again, that is a matter of respect and has nothing to do with love.

A third, more interesting argument for the claim that all love is universal love is presented in *Man for Himself*. If I love someone, I love them as the 'incarnation of essentially human qualities' (MFH 129–30), that is, qualities of character common to all human beings. (Fromm holds that while each individual is unique, 'at the same time he is representative of all the characteristics of the human race' [MFH 38], which seems to be Dilthey's thesis that human differences are always 'quantitative', never 'qualitative' [p. 26 above].) Thus, since when I love a person, what I love are the 'human qualities' in them, and since these qualities, to varying degrees are present in everyone, if I love anyone, I must love everyone.

The insight behind this argument is that love is not a sudden, non-rational magnetic attraction, though that may be how it begins. Rather, we can give reasons for loving the person we do. Love is, in part, a rational phenomenon. Fromm, however, misuses the insight. For first, it is not really true that every human individual has a touch of every human quality (for Dilthey, I suspect, the principle is more a useful research postulate than an empirical truth). The psychopath or sociopath is defined precisely by the lack of certain 'human qualities'—the Hitler problem mentioned above. Second, even if Dilthey's principle were to be true, the balance between the qualities, their relative weight, makes a crucial difference between the loveable and unlovable human being. The third deficiency in Fromm's argument is that while one can enumerate some of the things one loves in the beloved, one can never enumerate all of them, any more than one can fully enumerate what it is that makes one love a great work of art. This is something Fromm himself recognises in his final book *To Have or to Be?*: 'much can be said about me, about my character ... but the total me, my whole individuality, my suchness, that is as unique as my fingerprints are, can never be fully understood, not even by empathy'—a limitation, he adds, on even the best psychology (HB 87; see, too, n12). Since the beloved is not reducible to any set of loveable qualities, the argument that the object of my love is a set of qualities that are universally instantiated fails.

Love as the Solution. As a final remark about love, I want to comment on its strategic role in Fromm's overall argument, its role in allowing us to recover,

within the patriarchal order, the security we once experienced in the matriarchy. There is, recall, no going back to the security of the matriarchy. That form of at-homeness is gone forever. How then are we to overcome our incipient anxiety and 'homelessness'? Since freedom and individuality can never be abolished (though they can be repressed), 'man has no choice', we have seen, 'but to unite himself with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work' (pp. 219–20 above; productive work I shall come to shortly). Only in love, in the 'solidarity' of loving 'community', can one find 'a new human form of rootedness' and a 'truly human home' that will make up for the loss of our 'natural roots' (p. 219 above). In the end, however, Fromm admits that love, as he conceives it, a relationship that preserves the 'I' within the 'we', cannot fulfil that function. Life, he says, is fragile: our lives and health are subject to accidents beyond our control. 'Because of the conditions of our existence we cannot feel secure about anything'. The 'psychic task', then, which we must set ourselves, is 'not to feel secure, but to be able to tolerate insecurity, without panic and undue fear' (SS 190). Coming towards the end of the book, this is a great disappointment: we had been led to believe that the whole point of the book was to point the way to a final synthesis of freedom and security, and now we are told there is no synthesis, that we just have to put up with insecurity. (It is somewhat like a crime writer telling us on the last page that she, too, has no idea who did it.) The ultimate source of all insecurity is, of course, death. Fromm tells us that we must 'be able to love life, and yet to accept death without terror' (SS 197). But as to how we are to avoid terror, he offers not a word. This is again a great disappointment. The security of the matriarchy consisted in the dissolution of the individual within the whole, which means, says Fromm, that 'primitive man' would have expressed his sense of identity in the formula 'I am we' (SS 59–60). Since the 'we' is immortal, or at least not definitively mortal, for matriarchal humanity (or pre-humanity), the problem of death does not exist. For Fromm, however, any attempt by *us* to recapture this 'symbiotic' 'submergence' of individuality is pathological: it expresses itself only in sinister phenomena such as nationalism and the authoritarian personality. So, on the one hand, he says that we must abandon all attempts at the dissolution of individuality, but on the other, he says we must not allow the certainty of death to darken our days. The question 'How?' hangs in the air.

In fact, it is not merely 'primitive' peoples who engage in the 'matriarchal' abolition of the problem of death. The notion of submergence, we have seen, is embodied in the account of our proper relation to the world provided, *inter alios*, by Rilke, Jaspers, Tillich, and Heidegger (pp. 54, 128–30, 193 above), and actually finds German roots in the medieval mysticism of Meister Eckhart. Even Freud acknowledged the phenomenon of the 'oceanic feeling', though claimed never to have experienced it himself. Fromm, too, eventually acknowledges that one way of overcoming individuality and insecurity lies in 'orgiastic states' in which one achieves 'fusion with the group'. Such states are fine, he

says, when they are embraced by the rituals of a 'primitive tribe', but in our 'non-orgiastic' culture, they can be produced only by sex or drugs (or rock 'n' roll, one is tempted to add). With us, they leave us feeling more anxious when we emerge from the state than when we entered, and lead us down the rocky path to ever-increasing addiction (AL 11–12).

One can tell from this that Fromm has little feeling for music. In this respect, he resembles Socrates, as pictured by Nietzsche, the adamant proponent of 'Apollonian', or in Fromm's terminology 'patriarchal', reason. Music, Nietzsche holds, is essentially 'Dionysian': in Fromm's terminology 'matriarchal'. In great music, we experience the 'oceanic feeling' in which individuality, together with all the categories of conceptual reason, is suspended. In prison and awaiting death, notes Nietzsche, Socrates had a dream of himself 'practicing music' (*The Birth of Tragedy* sec. 14), the implication being that he realised his life had been closed off to essential reality. It is also the case, though Nietzsche does not mention this, that Socrates defined philosophy as a 'preparation for death'. What Socrates' dream told him, one can infer, is that the oceanic feeling is the completion of the preparation for death. Contra Fromm, there is nothing necessarily pathological about the oceanic feeling. Far from it: for those who disbelieve in Edith Stein's immortal thing called 'the soul', it would seem to be *the way to security in the face of death*.

Productive work. To overcome the anxiety and insecurity of 'homelessness', to repeat, 'man has no choice but to unite himself with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work'. While love has an intuitive relevance to the problem of overcoming anxiety, work does not. 'Love and work' is an odd-sounding phrase. All that Fromm provides by way of explaining the relevance of (productive, creative) work is the claim that 'only by productive work does [man] relate himself to nature, become one with her and yet not submerged in her' (SS 66). What does 'becoming one with' nature mean? Making sense of this obscure utterance is made more difficult by the fact that it cannot possibly mean 'recovering our lost at-homeness' in mother nature because, of course, our 'natural roots', our former 'home in nature' is 'irretrievably lost' (SS 346).

The elucidation Fromm offers is the following. With the transition from the matriarchy to the patriarchy, 'man separates himself from nature, from the original unity with her, but at the same time unites himself with her again as her master and builder' (SS 172). Why should someone who 'builds' in or on nature 'unite' himself with it?

Given that Fromm couples 'building' with 'mastery', this suggests that a return to the authoritarian personality, and particularly to its 'sadistic' aspect, might illuminate the notion of 'uniting' with nature. Sadism, to repeat, is an 'escape from freedom': unable to bear the 'isolation and weakness of one's own self', the sadist—like the masochist—aims at 'symbiosis': aims, that is, at 'swallowing' his object, an activity which destroys the object's 'integrity' as an

individual (EF 156). With respect to the sadist, then, becoming one with his object is a matter of ‘eat[ing]’ it up, ‘incorporat[ing]’ it into himself (EF 142).

Fromm, of course, deplores the authoritarian personality, deplores it as a relationship between human beings, at least. He seems unaware, however, that his account of the proper relationship between humanity and nature effectively reproduces the sadistic side of that relationship. As the sadist seeks security by mastery and incorporation, so Fromm seeks security through the scientific mastery of nature, ultimately, one assumes, through the scientific overcoming of death. But if the relationship is pathological in one case, surely it is in the other. The two attitudes are indeed inseparable: someone inclined to view non-human nature as nothing but raw material for his building projects will be strongly disposed to regard human nature—‘human resources’—in the same way.

Fromm is an urban and indeed ‘patriarchal’ thinker. ‘Mother’ nature figures in his work only as something we should free ourselves from and then ‘master’. In *To Have or to Be?* (1976), he becomes aware that this ‘sadistic’ attitude to nature has consequences: ‘technological progress has created ecological dangers’ (HB 2), he finally observes. The ‘messianic vision of harmony between human-kind and nature by conquering nature’ ‘has blinded us to the facts that natural resources have their limits and can eventually be exhausted’ (HB 7–8). This, however, is not the belated appearance of the respect that nature is due, but simply the warning that the ‘mastery’ of nature must be enlightened mastery. To the ‘messianic vision’ of harmony through conquest—the ‘sadist’s’ vision, I have argued—he has no objection since it is, in fact, his own.

Notes

- 1 Friedman (2013) 60.
- 2 N. McLaughlin (1999) 131.
- 3 McLaughlin (1999) 123.
- 4 Freud (1989) 62.
- 5 Quoted in Funk (2013) 9.
- 6 Quoted in Rickert (1986) 352.
- 7 Friedman (2013) Prologue.
- 8 Fromm took over the idea of the matriarchy as preceding the appearance of patriarchy from the great Swiss antiquarian, jurist, and anthropologist, the Basel professor and patriarch Johann Jakob Bachofen (SS 42–4).
- 9 The Ju/’hoansi Bushmen of eastern Namibia, who retained their form of life well into the twentieth century, worked, the anthropologist James Suzman discovered, only 15 hours a week. The rest of the time they rested or had fun. They were well nourished, and lived long and contented lives. See Suzman (2020).
- 10 Chomsky’s endorsement of *The Sane Society* inside the front cover.

8 Axel Honneth

The struggle for recognition

Axel Honneth was born in 1949 in Essen in the industrial Ruhr district of Germany. He studied philosophy and sociology in Bonn, Bochum, Berlin, and Frankfurt, where he completed his Habilitation (second PhD) with Habermas in 1990. As a student, Honneth was in close contact with the student revolutionaries of 1968, but soon rejected their commitment to Marxism (as interpreted by Louis Althusser) in favour of Habermas' version of social democracy.¹ From 1991 to 1992, he taught in Konstanz (where the present author had the privilege of attending one of his seminars) and then in Berlin. In 1996 he returned to Frankfurt, and in 2001 became Habermas' successor as Director of the Institute for Social Research, for which reason he is regarded as the central figure of the 'third' Frankfurt School of critical theory. Since 2011, he has divided his time between Frankfurt and Columbia University in New York. Although, unlike his Frankfurt School predecessors, Honneth has little reputation as a public intellectual, within the fields of academic philosophy and sociology, he is an important figure, 'one of the major theorists of our time', according to Simon Critchley.

In what follows, I confine myself mostly to two major texts, *The Struggle for Recognition*, and what Christopher Zurn calls his 'second magnum opus', *Freedom's Right*.

Section I: *The Struggle for Recognition*

The thesis

The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts is an expanded version of Honneth's Habilitation thesis. It was published in German in 1992 and in English translation in 1995. As Zurn notes in his introduction to Honneth's work, when the book appeared, 'it was clear that a major new voice in the tradition of critical theory had arrived' (Z x).

Like his Frankfurt School predecessors (GTC I chaps. 2 and 3), Honneth views critical theory as an interdisciplinary endeavour with an 'emancipatory interest'² and, as such, as having 'normative content' (SR 68). What this means

should become clearer if we try to provide a clear statement of the book's thesis.

At a first approximation, Honneth's thesis may be said to consist of two assertions. The first claims that the principal force that propels social change is not the struggle for the satisfaction of material interests—chief among which is self-preservation—but rather the 'moral' struggle for *Anerkennung*, for 'acknowledgment' or 'recognition'. The concept of 'recognition' comes from Hegel, whose philosophy of his early, Jena period Honneth claims to be reinterpreting in a way that makes it plausible in a 'postmetaphysical' age (SR 1). What 'postmetaphysical' indicates is that while, as we shall see, *The Struggle for Recognition* shares Hegel's optimistic, progressive view of history, Honneth does not believe in Hegel's 'world spirit' unfolding itself in history according to inexorably progressive laws. 'Postmetaphysical' seems to mean post Hegel's metaphysics.

The 'predominant' view (SR 161) of historical change, says Honneth, is that it is a 'struggle of interests'. This is the account offered, *inter alios*, by both Marx and Habermas. His own 'struggle for recognition' view is thus a minority position. The dominant view, as he says, derives from Hobbes, and before him Machiavelli.

As we have seen, Hobbes pictures the institution of the state as having arisen out of a 'state of nature'. This is a condition of 'war, all against all' in which the life of the individual is doomed to be 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. In the Hobbesian picture, fully formed rational human agents already exist in the state of nature. Skilled in game theory as they are, they work out that the only way to end the state of universal war is for each to surrender the right to violence to a sovereign. This act of mutual surrender is represented as the origin of the state. Honneth claims, probably correctly, that Hobbes did not intend this as an historically true account of the origin of the state but rather as thought experiment designed to justify the state by revealing the actual nature of social relations: without the existence of a powerful state with a monopoly on the use of violence, society would collapse into universal war (SR 9). The social world, in other words, is made up of self-interested, rational egos competing, all against all, for scarce resources. Nietzsche's 'life is the will to power, and nothing besides' clearly belongs to this tradition.

On the Hobbesian view, then, social life, and hence social change, is the product of the struggle of interests. This is what Honneth's Hegelianism denies: not the struggle of interests, not in particular the struggle for self-preservation, but rather the struggle for recognition is what produces social change.

The second component of Honneth's thesis is the following. Recognition is, as his fellow recognition theorist Charles Taylor puts it, not just a courtesy we owe people but rather 'a vital human need'.³ To deny people recognition is thus to harm them and is therefore wrong. Hence the struggle for recognition is not just the agent of social change, it is the agent of, in particular, *morally*

progressive change. Insofar as the history of modern Western society is overall, as both Hegel and Honneth assume, a history of moral progress, the agent of that progress, Honneth claims, is the struggle for recognition: ‘the moral force within lived social reality that is responsible for development and progress is a struggle for recognition’ (SR 84). And again: the struggle for recognition is ‘the actual source of motivation for social progress’ (SR 144, cf. 168). (The question of whether ‘a force’ and ‘a source’ might not be more plausible is one to which I shall return.)

Like most philosophers in the continental tradition, Honneth develops and defends his thesis in extended dialogue with the figures in the history of philosophy who constitute his ‘significant others’. The main ones are Kant, the American philosopher–psychologist George Herbert Mead (who was also important to Honneth’s mentor, Habermas), and, first and foremost, of course, Hegel. This mode of argument sometimes makes it hard to tell whether Honneth is merely propounding in particular Hegel, or both propounding and endorsing him. As I have presented them so far, Honneth’s and Hegel’s theses are virtually identical. In fact, however, Honneth adds significant qualifications to Hegelian ideas. The first is to allow that some social struggles really are struggles for economic improvement, so that his own project is not to reduce *all* social struggle to the struggle for recognition (but see p. 244 below). A second modification to the Hegelian view follows from this. For if not all struggles are ‘moral’ demands for recognition, if some are moved by the ‘pursuit of interests’ rather than ‘moral reactions’ (SR 164–5), then the ‘struggle for recognition’ paradigm is not intended to represent the genesis of all social change. Rather, it is intended to provide an ‘interpretative framework’ (SR 168) that enables one to identify those social changes that have contributed to the moral progress of the West. Following Martin Luther King, President Obama often spoke of the ‘moral arc’, a concave curve representing (with many dips on the way) the upward moral development of Western history. The struggle for recognition is Honneth’s tool for identifying and explaining the key points on this graph of (alleged) moral development.

Recognition and identity

The self that appears in Hobbes’ state of nature, we saw, is fully formed prior to the arrival of the state, prior, indeed, to any other form of social interaction. For Hegel and Honneth, on the other hand, there is no pre-social, human self. Rather, the self is socially constructed, is constituted, as Honneth puts it, ‘intersubjectively’. It seems, indeed, that Honneth’s self is social all the way down, as it were: Freud’s notion that we are biologically endowed with both constructive and destructive drives, accepted, as we saw, by his Frankfurt School predecessors Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse (pp. 201–2 above), is something he denies (SR 95–8, cf. Z 46–7). For Honneth, it seems, the

new-born child really is, in Fromm's words, 'a blank sheet of paper on which society writes its text' (p. 216 above). Why should we believe this?

The key figure who enables Honneth to translate Hegel into 'postmetaphysical' language is George Herbert Mead. Mead's philosophical psychology turns on a distinction between the 'I' and the 'me'. The I, the subject of consciousness and action in ordinary first-person consciousness, is not an object of consciousness. As we have noted several times, the eye cannot perceive itself, and neither can the 'I'. To become conscious of myself as something more than the mere 'X' of Kant's transcendental apperception, I need to turn myself into a grammatical accusative, a 'me' (or 'you'). This can happen only when I adopt a second-person perspective on myself (SR 75), something we are familiar with when we monitor or criticise our own behaviour. If I say to myself, 'That was really stupid' or write on my draft 'Rewrite this paragraph!', I am implicitly taking another person's view of myself. The capacity to adopt this 'decentred' (SR 74) view of the self, to understand what my 'gestures' mean to the 'generalised other' (SR 78), allows me, for the first time, to form an image of who I am: of my concrete traits, my desires, goals, strengths, and weaknesses, and so for the first time to be conscious of my identity. Only by adopting this perspective can I become 'self-conscious'.

The second-person view of the self is, however, not merely cognitive. Rather, it is heavily impregnated with social norms: as Mead says, in the 'remembered words of the parents' the child thinks of its conduct as either good or bad (SR 76). As the child matures, it understands social norms as the rules of a co-operative enterprise, rules that determine its obligations to others but also the rights it has that others are obligated to respect.⁴ Here, says Honneth, we can speak of 'recognition': the child recognises the others as objects of respect but also recognises itself as an object deserving respect (SR 79–80). And here, we discover the origin of the 'struggle for recognition', a struggle that can occur when others have, as it were, broken the rules and denied one the respect that is owed.

Thus the origin of the struggle for recognition. But exactly what is 'recognition'? According to Honneth, it takes three forms, so that to achieve full psychological 'integrity' (health), one needs to be the recipient of all three (SR 170–1). They are: love, legal and moral acknowledgement, and social esteem.

Love and self-confidence

Honneth uses 'love' to cover all emotional attachments within the sphere of intimate life: the parent–child relation, erotic love, and friendship. The most important of these is the relationship between mother and child because, according to Honneth, this establishes the pattern, the 'logic', as it were, of all 'love' relationships.

Following the child psychologist Donald Winnicott, Honneth views child development not, à la Freud, as the child's 'monological' adjustment of its 'libidinal' drives to the reality of a recalcitrant world, but as a 'dialogical' negotiation between it and its mother. In utero and in early babyhood, mother and child are merged into a single 'subjectivity': the mother thinks of the baby's needs as the totality of her needs, and the baby, as it were, agrees, thinks of the mother as nothing more than a part of the system for satisfying its needs. As time passes, the mother recovers parts of her previous life and begins to leave the baby alone as she attends to other social connections. At about six months, the child gets the point and recognises the mother as an independent object that lies beyond its control. It begins to act aggressively to the mother, not exactly because it resents its loss of omnipotence, but rather to test whether this emotionally charged object really does belong to a reality it cannot control. Eventually the child accepts, 'recognises', the independence of the mother, while the mother, in the child's acts of aggression, recognises its independence. If things go well, the child accepts that, though the mother is sometimes absent, she continues to love it. Mother and child thereby learn to love each other without having to merge. As a result, the child feels secure in its world and begins to develop the 'self-confidence' that is the precondition for its being able to participate in public life. According to Honneth, this negotiation between 'symbiosis' and recognition of difference is the key to all successful intimate relations. In both erotic relations and platonic friendship, there is an oscillation between merging and separation (SR 95–107).

Legal rights and respect

To belong to a system of legal relations is to recognise oneself as the bearer of rights. As mature love depends on mutual acceptance of independence within the bonds of affection, so recognition of myself as the bearer of legal rights is contingent on understanding myself as a member of a legal community in which everyone else is also the bearer of legal rights.

Everyone is equal before the law. At least in a modern legal system, the rights I possess are identical to the rights possessed by every other citizen. Rights can be classified as civil, political, and social. Civil rights—the 'negative' rights such as freedom of conscience, speech, religion, and from arbitrary arrest—developed in the eighteenth century; political rights, the rights of participation in government, developed with the expansion of democracy in the nineteenth century; and 'social' or welfare rights were the product of the twentieth century. (This is only a rough periodisation: as Honneth knows, the German welfare state was largely Bismarck's nineteenth-century creation.)

To experience oneself as the bearer of rights is to possess 'self-respect'. In Kant's language, one experiences oneself as an 'end in itself', as possessing the 'dignity' of being a free, responsible, and equal member of the legal community.

This unique kind of self-respect can be acquired in no other way (SR 107–21). Suppose that one is a slave in a nineteenth-century household in the American South. One is treated as a member of the family, beloved by everyone. Yet one is still a slave: one knows that the other members of the household have a dignity one does not oneself possess—and one knows that they know it too.

Social esteem and self-esteem

As with self-confidence and self-respect, self-esteem is a vital human need. Like them, it depends on recognition by others:

[I]n order to be able to acquire an undistorted relation-to-self, human subjects always need—over and above the experience of affectionate care [love] and legal recognition—a form of social esteem that allows them to relate positively to their concrete traits and abilities.

(SR 121)

Unlike legal relations, however, social esteem is gradated. Whereas everyone in a modern liberal democracy has the same legal rights, some people are esteemed more than others. And unlike love, which is directed towards the beloved's (entire) personality, social esteem is directed towards someone's achievements.

Social esteem is earned on account of one's contribution to more or less clearly defined social values and goals. It therefore presupposes an 'intersubjectively shared value horizon' (SR 121): as Hegel called it, a community-defining 'ethical substance' (*Sittlichkeit*). Within such an overarching horizon, individuals are esteemed to the extent that their individual flourishing—or as Honneth calls it 'self-realisation'—is, at the same time, a contribution to social goals and values. If every member of the social totality receives social esteem, then it has ascended to a state of what Hegel calls 'ethical life' (SR 23) and Honneth calls 'solidarity' (SR 128–9 *et passim*).

In a 'traditional' community in which everyone shares the same way of life, the same set of values and ideals, social solidarity is more or less a given. But in modern liberal democracies, with the multitude of different ways of life they embrace, it is not at all obvious how social (and hence self-) esteem for all can be achieved. Honneth, however, believes that, in principle, it can be. This reveals his high ambition: contrary to the assumption that they are antagonists, he wants to show that there can be a synthesis between the liberal life of the present and the communal life of the past, between liberalism and communitarianism (SR 91).

Forms of misrecognition

Without the concept of recognition we cannot, says Honneth, make sense of concepts such as 'insult', 'disrespect', or 'humiliation' (SR 131–9). Acts such as

these often cause social and material harm: if my voting rights are suppressed, I cannot vote for the candidate who will represent my interests. But more importantly, according to Honneth, they also cause psychological harm, injure one's psychological relation to oneself. Since there are three types of recognition, there are three types of disrespect or misrecognition (*Mißachtung*).

* * *

Love, we saw, generates trust in the social world, generates the 'confidence' to play a positive role in public life. But such trust is irretrievably damaged by rape or torture: the basic self-confidence one learns through love 'is always followed by a breakdown of trust in the social world' (SR 133).

This seems plausibly true, although here and elsewhere Honneth perhaps underestimates human resilience, the ability to recover from trauma—an issue to which I shall return. What is somewhat obscure, at least in *The Struggle for Recognition*, is why, and in what sense, such acts constitute a failure of 'recognition', and in particular of the kind of recognition paradigmatically achieved (if things go well) between mother and child. In a later work, *Reification*,⁵ Honneth's engagement with Lukács' concept (GTC II 13–14), he develops the concept of 'antecedent ... recognition' (R 117), that is to say, the recognition of a being as a person rather than a mere 'thing' such as a car or a computer. This is part of what the child grasps in understanding the mother and itself as independent beings: at about nine months, says Honneth, the child grasps that the mother is not merely an object beyond its control but also an 'intentional agent' (R 115), a being that has desires and intentions as it does itself. Torture and rape are failure of precisely this kind of basic recognition because they 'reify' the victim's body of another, turn it into a recalcitrant 'thing' to be disposed of as one would a malfunctioning computer or a blow-up sex doll.

* * *

The misrecognition that harms the 'moral self-respect' acquired through legal status consists in discriminatory denial of rights, the denial to some of rights that are granted to others (133–4). So, for instance, the denial of votes to women was a form of infantilisation, a treatment of women as less than full members of society, as incapable of the moral responsibility required of full members. Honneth does not actually say that the denial of rights always harms self-respect, only that it 'can' do so. This is as well, since, in the case of the suffragettes, it was precisely their—in many cases, undamaged—self-respect that led them to radical resistance. Another reason the 'can' is important is that in 'traditional' societies, social rights follow the principle of the 'division of labour', so that, as social roles differ, so do legal rights. As Scheler says (or at least claims), within the 'estates' system of medieval feudalism, feelings of

social humiliation—he borrows the term *ressentiment* from Nietzsche—were almost entirely absent. Within a given estate everyone was roughly equal, while the idea of a peasant or artisan comparing himself unfavourably with a knight was inconceivable (GTC II 130). As Honneth recognises, the conditions under which an *absence* of rights constitutes a *denial* of rights are historically variable (SR 134).

Honneth's rather brief discussion of the denial of rights lacks an explicit discussion of the conditions under which the absence of rights is experienced as a denial of rights. I think that what prevents him from doing this is his habit of using 'moral' and 'legal' interchangeably. This is counterintuitive since the question of whether a society's legal system adequately reflects its morality is clearly a sensible one. I would furthermore suggest that it is precisely where they become disjoint, where the dominant morality of a society is in advance of its legal system, that the absence of rights is experienced as a denial.

* * *

A 'successful relation' to oneself, claims Honneth, depends on 'intersubjective recognition of one's abilities and accomplishments'. So the denial of such recognition, the denial of social esteem, damages one's self-esteem. The fundamental form of such misrecognition is, he says, 'the denigration of individual or collective ways of life'. As we saw, social esteem attaches to those who fulfil social values and goals. If, says Honneth, the 'cultural horizon' of a society is hierarchical in a way that downgrades certain forms of 'self-realisation', it robs individuals of the ability to see their form of self-realisation as 'something of positive significance within the community' and this 'typically brings with it a loss of personal self-esteem' (134–6). The 'typically' here is important, because in some cases, personal self-esteem is clearly independent of social esteem: the social revolutionary, for example, does not wish for social esteem because he or she regards the grounds on which such esteem is granted as worthless. I shall return to this issue later on.

Recognition and social development

We are now in a position to provide a fuller account of the main thesis of Honneth's book, the thesis that the driving force in social change is not, as the 'predominant' theory has it, the struggle of material 'interests' but rather the 'moral' struggle for recognition: contra the Marxists (and the '68-er' student revolutionaries from whom Honneth separated himself [p. 228 above]), culture is a force more important than economics.⁶ As noted, Honneth admits that some forms of resistance to a social order can be, and have been, driven by material interests: the 'recognition model' is not intended to replace the 'interests model' and it is always an empirical question as to which is operative on a particular occasion (p. 230 above). What he does seem to hold, however, is, to

repeat, that insofar as social changes represent moral progress, they are driven by the struggle for recognition rather than satisfaction of interests—though subjects may sometimes misinterpret their own motives.

Given that there are three kinds of misrecognition, one would expect there be three kinds of morally progressive social change. Honneth denies, however, that the misrecognition that harms ‘self-confidence’ is such a force: since self-confidence is something that is generated in ‘the circle of primary [intimate] relationships’, damage to it cannot be a force for ‘societal conflict’ and change (SR 162). This is surely a mistake: attempts to effect legal changes so that rape can occur within marriage and torture becomes a crime are the more or less direct results of the experience of being reduced to a recalcitrant ‘thing’.

‘Shame’, ‘diminished self-respect’, is the result of the passive acceptance of social humiliation, either in the form of denial of rights or denial of social esteem (SR 160–70). The slave who accepts his role as an ‘Uncle Tom’ likely feels ashamed of himself. And so, since shame is an unpleasant emotion, misrecognition tends to generate resistance to a social order that engages in such forms of misrecognition. The denial of legal equality generated both the suffragette and ‘gay rights’ movements. The struggle for social esteem is what, to a large degree, Honneth believes, underlies ‘identity’ politics (SR 132). So, for instance, the Maori struggle to have the Maori language adopted as a second official language of New Zealand/Aotearoa, and to have Maori names accompany or even replace European place names, might be regarded as not primarily a struggle for economic elevation but rather a ‘post-colonial’ struggle for cultural esteem, a struggle to have Maori forms of self-realisation esteemed alongside European forms. Of course, the struggle for rights, for esteem, and for improved material conditions are not mutually exclusive: all three may be involved in a given protest movement.

* * *

The struggle for recognition is, then, a major force for social change. But why is it a ‘progressive’ force? Why does the expansion of recognition represent moral ‘progress’?

As indicated, the grounding principle is simply the wrongness of harming people. Since misrecognition, in all its form, causes harm, a ‘distorted’ relation to oneself, it follows that the ever-widening extension of recognition of individual forms of self-realisation is a development that represents ‘moral progress’ (146, 168).⁷

With Hegel, then, Honneth believes that moral ideals of contemporary Western society—the ‘moral grammar’ of the book’s title—are morally superior to all earlier forms of morality, indeed, perhaps, to all non-Western forms of morality (a problematic claim to which I shall return). Of course, as speech is to varying degrees typically ‘ungrammatical’, so the actual practice of modern

Western societies may, to varying degrees, fall short of its ‘underlying’ (SR 26, 144) morality. The question arises, therefore, as to whether Honneth believes that not only the ideals we profess but also our actual behaviour is morally superior to all earlier Western societies. Given that he uses ‘societal development’ and ‘social progress’ as synonyms for ‘moral progress’ (84, 144), it seems that he does: if a social struggle for increased recognition occurs and is successful, he believes, a new level of moral excellence has been achieved. The possibility that what comes into being is not a new kind of behaviour but merely a new kind of talk is not one that he considers. I shall return to this issue.

Combining *Gesellschaft* with *Gemeinschaft*

What is the ultimate goal of the progressive expansion of recognition? One might say that Honneth is not actually committed to specifying a goal: since non-recognition is harmful, one might say, any reduction of non-recognition is beneficial. But actually, Honneth is eager to provide a goal, eager because, as I have suggested, he wishes to show the possibility of a synthesis of liberalism and communitarianism and so to sketch the portrait of a society in which such a synthesis comes into being—a version of Hegel’s ‘end of history’.

Although in everyday discourse ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’ are used interchangeably, neo-Hegelian moral philosophers, including Honneth, distinguish between them. Morality is thought of in a Kantian way as a matter of according everyone equal respect as ‘ends in themselves’ and thus concerns legality: a society that accords legal respect to all individuals is, for Honneth, a moral society. As we have seen, however, individual flourishing requires more than legal respect: to fully flourish, individuals also require the social esteem that transforms the moral society into, in Hegel’s sense, an ‘ethical’ community. And so an account of the ‘end-point of an expansion of relations of recognition’ (SR 171) must consist in a synthesis between morality and ethics, between legality and solidarity.

Hegel’s history of the ‘world’ (actually the West) begins, Honneth observes, with the ‘ethical’ life of the Greek polis. Here, there was no tension between freedom and solidarity (for which reason the *Phenomenology of Spirit* calls it the ‘happy’ state [secs. 444–83]). Within the ‘organic’ whole that was the polis, all citizens had their allotted roles to play, roles defined by the customs (*Sitten*) that constituted the ethos of the community. These were experienced not as restrictions on freedom, but as the medium within which, by fulfilling one’s role, one realised it—realised, as Isaiah Berlin calls it, one’s ‘positive’ freedom. The polis dissolved on account of the rise of ‘individualism’. People committed ‘crimes’ against communal customs because they wanted recognition, esteem, not merely for fulfilling their social function within the given division of labour but also for their unique individuality (SR 11–30). The growth of individualism took the form of legal relations. (In the *Phenomenology*—which

The Struggle for Recognition never discusses—this happened in the Roman Republic.) Now, however, the affective warmth of the ethical community has disappeared: social relations have become ‘formal and empty’ (SR 19). And so, if full human flourishing is to be achieved, history must advance to what Hegel calls ‘absolute ethical life’ (SR 13). In this notional ‘end of history’, individuals who have been isolated from each other by legal relations become reunited in affective as well as ‘cognitive’ recognition. To the legal order has been added Honneth’s ‘solidarity’, *Gesellschaft* has become (a liberal) *Gemeinschaft*. Hegel’s history of social relations thus describes a circle: at the end of history we return to the beginning, but return, as it were, older and wiser: the ‘happy’ state returns but with the demands of individualism incorporated within it. As I understand him, this is Honneth’s project too.

What, however, makes the project hard to achieve is, as noted, ethical pluralism: different cultures have different ‘value horizons’, different conceptions of the ‘good life’ (SR 90) for both individual and community. And within multicultural modernity, these culturally specific horizons exist side by side within the same polity. How, then, can we discover a single *Sittlichkeit* that allows for the mutual esteem of, solidarity between, all members of society? Is not any attempt to articulate such an ethic bound to be a form of cultural imperialism?

Honneth responds to this difficulty by saying that the point of any ethic is the ‘self-realisation’ of the individual. What must be avoided, however, is the universalisation of any particular conception of self-realisation. (Whether ‘self-realisation’ is itself a culturally specific notion is a question to which I shall return.) Honneth’s way of proposing a universal, but non-imperialistic *Sittlichkeit* is to propose not a contentful, but rather a ‘formal conception of the ethical life’, an account of the general ‘structure’ of a fully ‘successful’ life, which, as formal, is common to all culturally specific conceptions of the good life (SR 174–5), all conceptions, at least, that genuinely aim at the well-being of the individual.

This ‘formal conception’ is simply the structure that we have been examining. Since, as has been argued, individual flourishing requires the three forms of recognition and since all ethical systems aim at individual flourishing, the threefold ‘communicative enabling of self-realisation’ is something that can be ‘normatively extracted from the plurality of all particular forms of life’ (SR 172). Perhaps not all members of all cultural groups would immediately agree with this, but thoughtful attention to the empirical evidence about what is needed for human flourishing should eventually convince them. It is true, says Honneth, that the ‘entirety of the intersubjective conditions that can be shown to serve as necessary preconditions of self-realisation’ (SR 173) have not been satisfied by all historical ways of life. But that, he says, is not his concern, since his aim is to articulate the structure of any ‘post-traditional, democratic way of life’ (SR 175), which, as we know, is supposed to be ‘better’ than any of its predecessors.

Criticism

Honneth's ambitious project raises a number of questions. I shall discuss the following:

- (1) Is recognition, in all *The Struggle for Recognition's* three forms, really necessary to a fully flourishing life?
- (2) Is Honneth's Hegelian progressivism really true? Are we morally better than any of our historical ancestors?
- (3) Is 'struggle for recognition' really the best account of social progress? Might not 'struggle of interests' actually do a better job?
- (4) Does Honneth really succeed in combining liberalism and communitarianism? If not, is there a better way of doing so?
- (5) What about 'meaning'? Is not something missing from Honneth's account of human flourishing?
- (6) Is Honneth's theory of recognition speciesist?

Do we really need recognition?

Honneth's theory of recognition appeals a great deal to psychology and psychoanalysis, in particular, to the psychological studies of Mead and Winnicott as well as the psychoanalytic studies of Jessica Benjamin (SR 105–6). These and other studies, he claims, provide 'empirical' evidence (SR 110 et passim) that 'an undistorted relation to the self [is] ... dependent on three forms of recognition: love, [respect for] rights, and esteem' (SR 1). There are at least three difficulties with this claim. The first is that these supposed examples of 'empirical research' (SR 93), even of 'empirical science' (SR 75), are actually no more than theories, theories that suit Honneth's cause but which (along with philosophy and economics) belong to a field of study in which every theory is contested by a rival theory. (One can imagine Karl Popper turning in his grave at the idea of psychoanalysis as an instance of 'scientific research' [SR 96].) In terms of my own 'empirical' experience, I find Mead and Honneth's dismissal of Freud's account of the superego as society's 'garrison in an occupied [and potentially rebellious] city' in favour of the child's apparently resistance-less acceptance of the 'remembered words of the parents' as the arbiter of good and bad behaviour (p. 231 above) both unconvincing and excessively bland. (Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse would be similarly unconvinced [pp. 201–2 above].)

The second difficulty is that since Honneth's psychological studies have all been conducted in the twentieth century, rather than grounding a universally valid philosophical anthropology, the best they can do is tell us about the psychological needs of individuals born into twentieth-century WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic) societies—something the American

Psychological Association itself is worried about.⁸ He seems, that is, to have missed the point argued by his Frankfurt School predecessor Max Horkheimer, that because 'human nature' is essentially historical, it is a mistake to assume that generalisations true of present individuals are a fortiori laws true of all individuals in all historical epochs (GTC I 24–5). (The opposite mistake, unfortunately, is made by radical anti-capitalists who, having in mind the historical character of human nature, fail to see how deeply the ideology of free market capitalism is ingrained in the modern psyche, and therefore how difficult is the programme of a democratic deconstruction of the capitalist system. As Horkheimer says, while the elevation of historically local generalisations to universal laws is fallacious, such elevation all too easily functions as an effective 'ideology' [GTC I 24–5].) I shall return to the WEIRD worry in connection with the claim that equality of legal rights is essential to self-respect.

The third difficulty with Honneth's reliance on psychology lies in the difference between its aims and the aims of philosophy. The more or less immediate aim of psychology is to restore distressed and deviant individuals to normality. It is, however, by no means clear that normality should be regarded as any kind of an ideal by philosophy. As Fromm points out, in the case of an 'insane' society, to be a normal, functioning member is to be a highly 'defective' individual (pp. 216–7 above). To be sure, the socialisation of the infant consists in its internalising the norms of the parents—though perhaps in a more stressful manner than Honneth imagines—and, inevitably, part of growing up consists in seeking esteem from the social world as one satisfies these norms. But to continue to seek such esteem as an adult is to become a conformist, to succumb to Heidegger's 'dictatorship of the One'. While 'normality' is an ideal for psychology, Foucault's 'normalisation' is an anti-ideal for philosophy.

Conspicuous by their absence from Honneth's book are the saint, the revolutionary, and the artist. What, for example, would he have to say about van Gogh who, according to legend, sold only three paintings during his lifetime, two of them to his brother? Honneth must say that, lacking social esteem, van Gogh had an at least partially 'distorted' relationship to himself—which of course, as his fate in the final cornfield confirms, he did. But so what? To allude to the theme of Antony Burgess's *Clockwork Orange*, surely both the world and van Gogh himself would have been the poorer had he undergone treatment that rendered him a 'normal' human being. As Nietzsche reminds us, there is no 'health in itself', only 'innumerable healths' (*The Gay Science* sec. 120). Some individuals, romantic poets notoriously, flourish precisely by nurturing the distressing in themselves. Part of the trouble with Honneth's theory is its equation between a suitably capacious notion of 'flourishing' and the implicitly organic notion of 'self-realisation': for an acorn, happiness (as it were) is becoming a—normal—oak tree. And so we are invited to think that happiness for us is becoming 'normal'. Many of us, however, would agree with Sally Rooney that real, interesting, creative people are usually far from being 'normal people'.

None of this is to deny that there is indeed a powerful connection between contributing to the social good and the desire for recognition in the form of social esteem. Hölderlin thought about the connection and addressed his poem 'To the Relatives (*Heimkunft: An die Verwandten*)' to his fellow Germans who did not yet know of their 'relation' to him and his ideals, while Nietzsche, who was unknown until after he had lost his sanity, wrote his books for his fictional 'children' (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* II 14). Hölderlin and Nietzsche are both distressed at their lack of recognition, of esteem, and they hope to achieve it posthumously. They know they are suffering, yet embrace their suffering as the price of a higher calling.

A different case is the French revolutionary politician Count Mirabeau, one of Nietzsche's paradigms of a well-turned-out human being. According to Nietzsche, Mirabeau 'had no recall for the slights and insults directed at him and ... could not forgive simply because he—forgot' (*Genealogy of Morals* I sec. 10). If Nietzsche is to be believed, Mirabeau is someone with such strength of personality that he simply has no need for social esteem. Honneth might dismiss this as a psychological fiction (though it is unclear what the 'empirical' evidence could be for this), but I think one can imagine a biography of Mirabeau which makes him plausible as a real person. Honneth himself observes that it is parental love that endows an individual with the 'self-confidence' to engage in public life. But parental love comes in degrees of strength and expertise. One can suppose that Mirabeau grew up in the care of such excellent parents that he really was more or less impervious to fortune's slings and arrows. Honneth's account of the three forms of recognition that are needed for full flourishing is somewhat like a cooking recipe: each element is as essential as the other. What he does not take into account, however, is the possibility that a superabundance of one might obviate the need for one of the others.

Progressivism

Like Hegel, though without his metaphysical inevitabilism, Honneth has a progressive view of history. His argument seems to be this: (1) The point of any moral system is the flourishing of individual human beings. (2) Flourishing requires the three forms of recognition. (3) Modern Western society provides such recognition more completely than any of its historical antecedents. Therefore, (4) modern Western society is morally better than any of its antecedents.

Given the current meltdown of WEIRD societies, the collapse of the liberal world order, the death of reason and truth, the rise of populism and authoritarianism, a global pandemic, the warming of the planet and, as Jonas points out, the real possibility that we are in the process of extinguishing our own species, this self-congratulatory conclusion may strike one as 'tone deaf' (though, given the then-recent collapse of communism, it would have seemed less so in the 1990s). Nietzsche called the triumphalism of the right-wing Hegelianism

of David Struss a 'stupid ease and contentment' doctrine, and one might be tempted to a similar response to Honneth's progressivism. But what is actually wrong with the argument?

Premiss (1) would be rejected by many religious cultures for which the point of morality is to serve God, not humanity. And it would be rejected by anyone who believes in environmental ethics, a topic to which I shall return. But if we understand it as saying that the point of morality, insofar as it concerns humanity, is the flourishing of individuals, I think it is something many of us would accept. Premiss (2), however, is inconsistent with most Asian moralities: Confucianism, for instance, in its concern for the disciplined promotion of the common good, does not have the same conception of individual legal rights as does the West. And so Honneth faces the charge of Eurocentric cultural imperialism. Christopher Zurn observes that he must respond to this charge either by restricting the progressivist claim to the West or by claiming that Western societies really do produce more flourishing individuals than Eastern societies (Z 194–5). As I suggested, however, since Honneth's 'empirical evidence' concerning what does and does not promote flourishing is confined to subjects drawn from modern WEIRD societies, he has no evidence at all to support the latter claim, and, in reality, no evidence to support the former either.

Turning to (3), what requires examination is Honneth's persistent denigration of the European past. 'Traditional', pre-modern European societies had, he observes, 'hierarchical' social systems. Not only did these hierarchies constitute a division of labour into diverse functions and roles, they also constituted 'value hierarch[ies]' (SR 124) because social esteem was attached to individuals according to their social rank. Hence those at the bottom of the hierarchy could not live flourishing lives because of their diminished recognition. Honneth concedes that a degree of legal recognition attached to the medieval serfs who, unlike the slaves of the ancient world, did possess certain rights. Recognition of this sort, however, attached to them only as functionaries of social roles: they received no recognition as individuals, no social esteem. Ground down, then, by the weight of misrecognition, the lower orders in traditional societies could not live flourishing lives.

Hegel, too, thought that no one could properly flourish in the Middle Ages (the so-called 'Dark Ages'): he called it the age of the 'unhappy consciousness', unhappy because medieval people experienced themselves as homeless exiles from paradise (*Phenomenology of Spirit* secs. 206–30). But the idea that an entire epoch was one in which no one could be properly happy is not to be taken seriously. What Honneth fails to take seriously is the 'organic' conception of society according to which social hierarchy is *not* a hierarchy of value, but rather a conception in which social esteem attaches *equally* to all who perform their social function well. What he misses is the fact that, as the Christian age, the Middle Ages were the age of the equality of all souls before God: Gregory the Great's statement that 'by nature all of us are equal' was widely quoted and believed.

The idea of a social hierarchy in which all are equal in esteem is, of course, Plato's conception of the 'just' society. It is also the basic conception underlying 'compassionate' conservatism or what, following Benjamin Disraeli, the British call 'one-nation conservatism': social hierarchy combined with equality of worth. Of course, just as modernity can be falsely glorified, so traditional society can be sentimentalised—one thinks of *Downton Abbey*. Nonetheless, to assume that the medieval serf felt demeaned by his social rank, or frustrated by the lack of recognition of his individuality, is a failure of Dilthey's historical 'understanding' (pp. 16–28 above), a projection of the psychology of the WEIRD world onto the twelfth century. It is true that by the thirteenth century the urban bourgeoisie had begun to struggle against their lack of legal recognition within the feudal hierarchy, but what primarily motivated them was, surely, not a sense of humiliation—noble and burgher had little contact—but simply the desire to make money. I shall return later to the issue of recognition versus money.

Another question concerning (3) is whether there really has been an increase in recognition or merely in the lip service paid to it, lip service on the part both of the powerless and the powerful. In New Zealand, the Maori themselves sometimes joke about their own disposition to play on European cultural guilt as a way of extracting money from the Pakeha. On the part of the powerful, powerful corporations, for instance, it is certainly true that there is a great deal of genuflection towards 'wokeness'—'diversity', 'inclusion', 'LGBTQ+ rights', and so on—but it can be legitimately wondered whether such genuflection (which has the advantage of costing a corporation virtually nothing) does not mainly function as an 'ideology' (in the Marxist sense), a way of creating the illusion that oppression and exploitation are being extirpated when actually nothing has changed.⁹ In *The Struggle for Recognition*, as we have seen, Honneth draws no distinction between progressive speech and progressive action (p. 237 above). Later on, he revises the too-easily-assumed identity. In response to the charge that his progressivism ignores twentieth-century horrors such as the Holocaust, he writes that 'in spelling out the normative implications of already institutionalised spheres of recognition we, as theoreticians, have to try to give the best possible interpretations of them in terms of moral progress'.¹⁰ If I understand this utterance, it seems to say that the progress Honneth believes to have occurred is in the moral *ideals* of the West, its 'moral grammar', ideals of which practice may fall well short. But if recognition talk is just lip service, just a way of maintaining power on the part of the powerful and an attempt to gain power on the part of the powerless, in short, a veneer covering over the reality of a 'struggle of interests', our so-called ideals are not really ideals at all.

A final comment on the logic of Honneth's progressivist argument. Since individual flourishing requires recognition, and modern Western society recognises persons more fully and more extensively than any other society, it follows,

Honneth seems to claim, that, morally speaking, modern Western society is the best that humanity has yet achieved. But this argument is actually invalid. That recognition is necessary to flourishing by no means entails that it is sufficient. What else might be required? Material well-being for one thing. And meaning, a sense of purpose, for another. I turn first to the former.

The ‘struggle for recognition’ versus the ‘struggle of interests’

In *Redistribution or Recognition?*,¹¹ co-authored by Honneth and Nancy Fraser, Fraser argues that while Honneth wishes to reduce all forms of injustice to failures of recognition, there are actually two distinct forms (though in individual cases, they may coincide): economic injustice, the non-satisfaction of legitimate economic interests, and cultural injustice, the non-satisfaction of legitimate claims to recognition. The black banker who cannot get a taxi suffers cultural but not economic injustice,¹² the temporary philosophy lecturer (this is my own example, not Fraser’s) who works double the hours for half the pay of tenured faculty, suffers economic but not cultural injustice.

As Zurn points out, in *Redistribution or Recognition?*, Honneth oscillates between the strong, reductive thesis and a weaker thesis that accepts Fraser’s basic distinction (Z 139–40). In *The Struggle for Recognition*, however, it is clear that no attempt is made to reduce the struggle of interests to the struggle for recognition: the two forms of struggle are both acknowledged as agents of social change (pp. 230 above). What Honneth claims, however, to repeat, is that where the change in question is a *moral* change, then it is the result of the struggle for recognition (pp. 235–6 above). But this is surely a mistake. Given that the economic exploitation of workers is a form of injustice, even if it is nothing more than a ‘struggle of interests’ that reduces it—the hard-nosed bargaining of the powerful trade unions of the 1960s and 70s, for instance—the result clearly represents moral progress. Actions that lack moral motivation can nonetheless have morally beneficial effects. Typically, however, moral and self-interested motives will both be present so that action is overdetermined: worker demands are likely to be motivated both by material interests and by a sense of injustice.

The attempted synthesis between liberalism and communitarianism

Does Honneth really succeed in showing that a modern legal system together with all its civil rights—liberal individualism—can, in principle, be combined with universal solidarity, social esteem for all? The problem, recall, is that while esteem presupposes a shared ‘value horizon’, different cultures have different horizons. Honneth’s solution to the dilemma is to identify a set of values so

formal, so drained of content, that they can be agreed to by all, whatever their cultural affiliation: every culture aims at the flourishing of individuals, and since, allegedly, it can be shown empirically that the three forms of recognition are necessary to flourishing, members of every culture can in principle agree to endorse the social conditions of individual flourishing.

The difficulty, however, is social esteem. In Honneth's ideal society, everyone will be esteemed to the extent that their individual self-realisation contributes to the social good. So, whatever minority someone belongs to, if they coach a soccer team, endow a scholarship, volunteer to help the elderly, then they receive exceptionless social esteem. 'Esteem', however, is not just 'passive tolerance' or abstract approval. Rather, it consists in active 'sympathy' and 'care' (SR 128–9), a kind of love, in fact. But as Kant says, affective—'pathological'—love is something that cannot be commanded. Honneth agrees: 'liking and attraction' are 'out of the individual's control' (SR 107). Thus no matter how much I may abstractly approve the social contribution of a cultural 'other', there are almost certainly cultural 'others' whom, while I can refrain from denigrating them, I cannot bring myself to like. 'Solidarity', the warmth of *Gemeinschaft*, can never be achieved in a society where every non-pathological way of life receives theoretical acceptance.

More strongly, a society that accepts multiple forms of life within the same polity actually militates against solidarity. In a multicultural society, a society whose norms endorse an unrestricted plurality of minority cultures, social esteem is likely to be found only in one's own subculture. The result is the opposite of a society-wide *Gemeinschaft*: a multitude of non-communicating mini-cultures existing in emotional indifference to—and in many cases, active dislike of—each other. Zurn says that since recognition struggles have actually been going on for centuries, and since we have not yet arrived at such a 'balkanization' of society, such a result cannot be predicted to happen (Z 85–6). Prediction, however, is beside the point. With minorities sharing no common language, with racism endemic in all Western societies, with Islamic terrorists and white supremacists, with 'no-go' areas in many cities, with 'gated communities' ever more popular, the ghettoisation of Western society is not a prediction but a fact. Academics often fail to notice that they live in suburbs where almost everyone is the same colour (or at least level of education) as themselves.

Is there any possible way of combining liberalism with communitarianism? I believe there is. The key, as Honneth recognises, is a shared ethos, a shared way of life, a shared 'value horizon'. But such a horizon needs to be not his 'formal', supposedly content-less horizon but rather a horizon of, as Bernard Williams calls them, 'thick', genuinely life-guiding values. One way of attempting to ensure that there is no misrecognition of minority groups is to attempt to ensure that all individuals are esteemed whether they belong to a minority group or not. This, I have suggested, is the product of what Karl Jaspers calls

‘abstract’ thinking (p. 64 above), thinking that ignores the reality of human psychology. Another way, however, is to ensure that *there are no minorities*, or rather that multiplicity is embraced within a substantial unity, that all groups are contained within, and committed to, an overarching horizon of ‘thick’ values. The way to ensure this is to ensure that the nation state really is a *nation* state.

It may be objected that, given the multicultural state of modernity, the nation state is no longer possible. This, however, seems to me overly pessimistic. Every post-tribal society was, in the beginning, ‘multicultural’. Many factors contribute to a heterogeneous group becoming a nation, a ‘people’, most of which are not the result of human intention: settlement in and into a shared landscape and climate, a shared mode of production, a shared language, and a shared history of victories and defeats. The single most important intentional factor, however, is what the Germans (and Scandinavians) [GTC II 220 fn. 11], call *Bildung*: the education of maturing individuals into technical skills, but more importantly into the history, and hence the grounding values, of the community. Honneth’s book operates with an absolute distinction between ‘traditional’ or ‘conventional’ societies, on the one hand, and ‘modern’ or ‘post-conventional’ societies on the other. And he simply assumes that a *nation* state is, and should be, a thing of the past. This is an unsurprising view in someone who grew up in post-war Germany where words such as *Nation*, *Volk*, *Heimat*, and *Gemeinschaft*, sullied by their embrace by the Nazis, were expelled from public discourse. In my view, however, as the least bad form of communal living human beings have been able to devise, the nation state is not something we should want to relegate to the past. And the stubborn and growing resistance to cultural globalisation in almost all Western societies surely indicates that reports of the death of the nation state are greatly exaggerated. I conclude that, with the aid of *Bildung*, a genuine synthesis between liberalism and community remains a possibility.

Meaning

The argument of Honneth’s book can be expressed in terms of freedom rather than recognition. His notional ‘end-point’ (SR 171) of history is a society in which we have not only all the freedoms of our traditional liberal rights but also freedom from all forms of insult, disrespect, and humiliation (a serious problem for comedians). But freedom alone is not sufficient for the flourishing of individuals. What it also requires is meaning. And as Honneth’s mentor Habermas observes, it is not only freedom that is under threat in modernity but also meaning (GTC I 54). Ever since Nietzsche, philosophers have been commenting on the actual or potential ‘nihilism’ of modernity. But lack of meaning never appears in Honneth’s social pathology—in *The Struggle for Recognition*, ‘nihilism’ appears not even once.

Honneth comes closest to discussing meaning in his discussion of solidarity, for *thick* solidarity, a ‘value horizon’ of thick values, is what provides meaning. As Honneth recognises, thick solidarity is what provides an account of the good life—for both individual and community—an account which may or may not be sanctioned by religious authority. Honneth claims that with the weakening and eventual disappearance of our ‘religious or metaphysical heritage’, it was recognised that ethical obligations had to be the result of ‘inner-worldly decisions’ (SR 124). But to welcome the move to ‘decision’ is a mistake. As Heidegger and Husserl observe, a genuinely compelling ethic—an ethic that motivates as opposed to attaining mere intellectual assent—is one we are ‘already in’ as we arrive in adulthood (p.110 above)—already in as the result, first and foremost, of *Bildung*. But that of course—*Bildung* as enculturation into a thick ethical tradition—is something that cannot be practised in Honneth’s multicultural ideal society and would be condemned as ‘cultural imperialism’. As with all his Frankfurt School predecessors, Honneth’s exclusive focus on freedom prevents him from attending to our need for meaning.

Nature

Unlike Hegel, who wrote an entire *Philosophy of Nature*, nature makes no appearance in *The Struggle for Recognition*. The point of morality is human flourishing (p. 238 above); the flourishing of non-human nature is not, it appears, a matter of moral concern. But, of course, as I am sure Honneth would now recognise, it must be. To overcome the charge of speciesism, the conception of the scope of morality needs to be radically extended.

Section II: Freedom’s Right

Honneth’s ‘second magnum opus’ (p. 228 above) is the 400-page *Freedom’s Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, which appeared in German in 2011, and three years later, in English translation. Whereas *The Struggle for Recognition* is conceived as a ‘postmetaphysical’ updating of Hegel’s early philosophy, *Freedom’s Right* presents itself as a re-presentation of a work from the final decade of Hegel’s life, the *Philosophy of Right*—a qualified re-presentation given that, as Honneth concedes, whereas he sets out to defend democracy, Hegel did not believe in it (FR 254, 304).

The titles of Honneth’s two magna opera present the appearance of a dramatic change of direction: from ‘recognition’ to ‘freedom’. But this appearance is misleading, for as noted, most of what Honneth wishes to say about recognition can be reformulated in terms of freedom. There are, to be sure, some revisions of earlier views in the second work, but the two books should be regarded as continuous rather than contradictory.

The aim of *Freedom's Right*, says Honneth, is to provide a 'theory of justice'—an obvious and combative allusion to John Rawls' famous book—an account of a social order in which (as Plato puts it) all members receive their 'due' (FR 5).

Honneth's method

One way of constructing a theory of justice—Plato's, Rawls', or, according to Honneth, Habermas' method (FR 5)—is to perform a thought experiment in which we ask ourselves: Were we to be designing an ideal society, what would it be like? This method, which he calls 'normative idealism' (FR 42), Honneth rejects. His method, rather, is to look at actually existing society and discover principles of justice 'immanent' in it.

The identity, the 'ultimate reality' (FR 4), of a society depends, says Honneth, on a certain set of fundamental ideals and values, which, to repeat, Hegel calls its 'ethical substance' or 'ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*)' (FR 7–8). As the German *Sitte* (custom) indicates, while these may sometimes be articulated in the form of law, generally they will be understood rather than explicitly formulated. Honneth claims that even in a modern multicultural society, 'normative integration' by means of such values is a "transcendental" necessity' (FR 4). Although critics have viewed this claim as controversial,¹³ it is surely correct since, with the possible exception of a military dictatorship, every society depends on an at least minimal amount of voluntary norm-following behaviour. It probably seems controversial because although Hegel's term *Sittlichkeit* suggests the 'thick' web of custom characteristic of a pre-modern society, this, as we have seen (p. 238 above), is not what Honneth means by 'ethical life'.

Honneth's theory aims to articulate the ethical substance of the just society by providing an 'immanent analysis' of the normative foundation of modern, Western, liberal-democratic society. To the objection that there might be a large gap between this foundation and true justice so that we actually do need to resort to the 'normative idealism' of Rawls or Habermas, Honneth replies that because it can be demonstrated that 'prevailing values are normatively superior to historically antecedent social ideals or "ultimate values"' (FR 5), resorting to the Rawlsian thought experiment is unnecessary.¹⁴ At first sight, this appears to be the historical progressivism for which I criticised the *Struggle for Recognition* (pp. 241–4 above). In fact, however, as we have seen (p. 243 above), the later Honneth rejects such progressivism: given the Holocaust, he writes in *Freedom's Right*, 'we can no longer share Hegel's optimism that modern societies follow a continuous path of rational development' (FR 2–3). How, then, can we be confident that the norms of modern Western society really are superior to their historical ancestors?

Honneth's answer lies in a distinction between the normative foundations of a society and its current practice. He calls the excavation of this foundation

‘normative reconstruction’ (FR 6), which he distinguishes from the normative ‘construction’ (i.e., ‘normative idealism’) of Plato, Rawls, and Habermas. As in *The Struggle for Recognition*, he speaks of normative reconstruction as articulating the ‘moral grammar’ of a society (FR 127). But whereas in the earlier work there was little if any space between moral grammar and actual practice, Honneth is now (in the less triumphalist times of 2011) prepared to recognise, and sometimes insist on, a massive gap between the two. In the earlier work, the moral grammar of democratic life was almost identical with its current surface grammar: in the later work, it becomes very deep indeed. Honneth would not welcome this comparison, but *Freedom’s Right’s* distinction between current practice and normative foundation is essentially the same distinction Heidegger deployed when he infamously claimed that what he subscribed to in 1933 was ‘the inner truth and greatness of national socialism’,¹⁵ not the reality of Nazism, which was a horrific betrayal of that ‘truth’. Honneth even uses language that is reminiscent of Heidegger’s: normative reconstruction, he says, discloses the ‘true’ or ‘real’ (FR 176, 4) nature of democratic society. Honneth’s admission that much of recent Western history is a history of moral disasters is thus compatible with his claim that modern values are superior to their historical predecessors, because what he is talking about (though ‘prevailing’ [p. 248 above] is rather misleading) are not the values realised in current practice but rather the foundational values with respect to which current values may fall abjectly short.

It is because there may be—is—this gap between current reality and its foundational ‘grammar’, observes Honneth, that normative reconstruction possesses the ‘critical’ potential that locates it within the tradition of critical theory (FR 9). Criticism, then, will take the form of demonstrating not that the current order of things falls short of some Platonic ideal of social justice, but rather that it falls short of *its own* aims and standards.

The foundational value of modern society: freedom

What then are the foundational values of democratic society? There is, Honneth boldly claims, only one: freedom: ‘Ever since the French Revolution, hardly any group that has struggled for social recognition has failed to paint the slogan of individual freedom on its banners’ (FR 16). There are, of course, other Western values, but, he claims, ‘it is nearly impossible to articulate one of them ... without immediately grasping them as facets of the idea of individual autonomy’ (FR 16): while there are many values, ‘individual self-determination’ is the only fundamental value. This is an odd claim since, of course, the slogan of the French Revolution gave ‘equality’ and ‘fraternity’ equal billing with ‘freedom’. I shall return to this prioritising of freedom later on.

What, however, is freedom? Honneth distinguishes three aspects, which he calls ‘negative’, ‘reflexive’, and ‘social’ freedom. Negative and reflexive freedom

are necessary conditions of freedom, but—one of Hegel's central theses—only with the addition of social freedom is freedom in the full sense, the 'reality' of freedom (FR 121), achieved.

Negative freedom

Hobbes defined freedom as the absence of 'external impediments' to action. In a political context, says Honneth, Hobbes captures the deep-seated intuition of modern individualism that we all have a right to an area of negative freedom in our lives, the right to pursue aims, even if they are neither rational nor elevated, unobstructed by other people. This, claims Honneth, is the conception of freedom articulated in Sartre's existentialism and in Robert Nozick's libertarianism.¹⁶ It embodies the right to eccentricity, even narcissism, as long as its exercise is compatible with the negative freedom of others (FR 21–8).

Reflexive freedom

One reason negative freedom falls short of 'true' freedom is that it takes no account of internal constraints on the will, the constraints caused by, for instance, drug addiction, brainwashing, or the manufacture of false desires by the hidden persuaders of the advertising industry. True freedom thus requires, in addition to negative freedom, 'reflexive freedom' (FR 29–41), some kind of self-monitoring, a sorting of one's desires into the ones one reflectively endorses and the ones one does not. ('Reflective' thus seems to me to capture Honneth's notion better than 'reflexive'.) There are, claims Honneth, two versions of the idea that true freedom is reflexive freedom: the view that it is 'self-determination' or 'autonomy', and the view that it is 'self-realisation'. The former, based on the idea that freedom is a matter of rising above natural causation, is the Kantian idea that acting freely is acting on 'rational' desires, which, given the Kantian claim that rational action is moral action, means that free action is acting on moral desires. The other version of reflexive freedom postulates the idea of a 'true', pre-social self, what Herder calls the 'inner I'. (Honneth thinks the notion of a true self arrived with Rousseau and Romanticism; Foucault, who calls it a 'Californian' conception, dates it to the Catholic confessional of the seventeenth century in which one was encouraged to tell the priest all about one's 'true', and very sinful, lusts.)¹⁷ Acting freely is thus thought of as requiring one—perhaps through therapy—to distinguish one's 'authentic' desires from those that are socially imposed and to act on the former rather than the latter. As we have seen from the discussion of *The Struggle for Recognition* (p. 230 above), Honneth regards the idea of a pre-social self as a myth: rather than speaking of 'self-realisation' as 'self-discovery', therefore, he says, it is better to speak of 'self-construction' (FR 35–6) (of becoming,

as Nietzsche puts it, the ‘poets of our lives’). Honneth does not seem to have a preference between the moral autonomy and self-construction account of reflexive freedom. It seems, therefore, that he thinks of reflexive freedom as a matter of reflectively assessing one’s desires either in relation to moral norms or in relation to one’s long-term goals (which may or may not be moral), or both.

Social freedom

With ‘social freedom’ (FR 42–62), we arrive at the heart of Hegel’s and Honneth’s concern. Reflexive freedom, they point out, is not much use unless one’s social environment allows one to realise one’s reflectively chosen aims. So, for example, Nietzsche’s brilliant friend Lou Salomé was not free to become the intellectual she passionately wished to be because nineteenth-century German universities did not admit women. Freedom in the full sense of the word, ‘real’ freedom, thus requires not merely negative and reflexive freedom but also the social freedom that only an appropriate environment can provide. It requires the appropriate social practices, or as Honneth calls them (using the term in sociology’s quasi-technical sense) ‘institutions’, which make it possible for one’s aims to be realised.

A *prima facie* problem is the question of whether lack of social freedom might not just be a case of lack of negative freedom. Did not, for example, the German universities’ refusal to admit women constitute an ‘external impediment’ to the realisation of Salomé’s desire to become a professional intellectual? Not really. She could (and did), after all, write books and could at least hope to get paid for them. What is true, however, is that nineteenth-century Europe failed to do anything to *promote* the intellectual life of women, and that is what Hegel and Honneth regard as a condition on the reality of freedom: real freedom requires a social environment in which it is not merely possible to achieve one’s reflectively chosen aims, but one that positively nurtures their realisation (FR 60). This is why Hegel says that love and friendship are paradigms of freedom-nurturing ‘institutions’ (FR 44), although not of course the only ones. (This is a simplified account of Honneth’s understanding of the relation between freedom and the social environment. Later on, I shall attend to some of its complexities.)

What is the character of these freedom-nurturing institutions? Honneth says that they have to be what he calls ‘relational institutions’, institutions in which participants ‘view each other’s freedom as the condition of their own freedom’ (FR 176). So, for example, as a writer of books, I understand that my editor’s freely chosen role as an editor is a condition of my own freely chosen role as an author. In Hegel’s terminology, I ‘recognise’ (FR 44) the freedom of the other as not only compatible with (FR 45), but also as a condition of the realisation of, my own freedom.

At first sight, the idea of my freedom as dependent on the freedom of others seems to be clearly mistaken. I can freely choose to become a ruthless capitalist exploiter with no respect at all for the freedom of the workers in my Foxconn factory whom, through fear, I reduce to biological robots. This, however, is where Honneth's theory of justice comes into play. In terms, at least, of modern democratic thought, an exploitative society is not a just society. A just society—this is the heart of Honneth's conception of justice—is one in which *everyone* possesses social freedom. This is what Marx had in mind when he declared 'social cooperation to be the model of freedom' (FR 45). The essence of social justice is a society so structured that individuals' pursuit of their own aims fit into, as it were, a preestablished harmony in such a way as to promote each other's aims, as in the case of me and my editor. It is a matter of the 'complementary' (FR 45) realisation of our diversity 'in the experience of commonality'.¹⁸ This is the modern, democratic idea of what individuals are 'due': everyone should receive equal support in their striving to realise their individual, reflectively chosen aims.

It is because the 'reality' of freedom thus requires social freedom that justice can be defined neither in the Hobbesian manner as the outcome of a social contract, nor, in Habermas' manner, merely as the outcome of 'democratic will-formation'. And also why it cannot be defined in Rawls' manner as the outcome of an abstract thought experiment. The Hobbesian, Rawlsian, and Habermasian states are all compatible with sub-political and sub-legal social spheres in which social freedom is frustrated rather than fostered. For Honneth, justice must reside in the substance as well as the form of society. A full account of justice needs, therefore, to explore these sub-legal spheres of life: an adequate theory of justice must be an 'analysis of society' as a whole (FR 1).

As we have seen, however, while 'real' freedom is social freedom, negative and reflexive (reflective) freedom are by no means irrelevant to it: they are, rather, preconditions of social freedom, they create the 'possibility' of freedom (FR 69). Accordingly, Honneth begins his account of the just society with an account of the institutions through which—ideally—it embodies both negative and reflexive freedom. The intended architecture of the remainder of Honneth's book is thus the following: negative freedom is to be shown to be embodied in 'legal freedom', reflexive freedom in 'moral freedom', and social freedom in the spheres of 'personal relations', 'the market', and 'democratic will-formation'. I begin with legal freedom.

Legal freedom

The legal rights that belong to a modern democracy, notes Honneth, have been expanded beyond the original liberal rights: they include 'positive' rights to political participation as well as the 'negative' rights of traditional liberalism—freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of speech, opinion, and religion, and so on. While the 'ethical' value of the positive rights, their contribution to the

ethical substance of a modern, democratic society (p. 248 above), is the creation of a public space of ‘democratic will-formation’ (pp. 259–60 below), the ethical value of the traditional liberal rights is the creation of a private space in which one can exercise one’s reflexive freedom without any kind of external interference: a space in which one can experiment with alternative accounts of one’s life’s ‘meaning’, experiment in dialogue with others as well as monologically, which is why privacy of communication is an ethically valuable negative right (FR 72).

Legal freedom is valuable, but also potentially pathological. Particularly since the 1960s, there has been a trend towards legislating behavioural norms that previously were at best informally enforced, norms governing parent–child, teacher–student, worker–manager relations, for instance. The result of this is a tendency to retreat into a shell of rights, to reduce ourselves and each other to nothing but legal persons. This is a pathological development, first, because it destroys social cooperation (with respect, for example, to the wearing of face masks during a pandemic)—and therefore social freedom—and, second, because it reduces the self to a playground for random impulses. If I think of myself as nothing but a person with the right to ‘do what I want’, then I become the playground for the flux of random impulses. Locked into the shell of legal freedom, I become incapable of forming ‘long term’ aims and, as such, lack a genuine ‘will’ (FR 72–94).

Moral freedom

‘Moral freedom’, the freedom to act according to moral norms, is, says Honneth, anchored in the moral grammar of modern democracies. We recognise it as a ground for resisting unjust social demands. Honneth’s view seems to be that it plays the same negative role as legal freedom, that of guaranteeing a space within which reflexive freedom can occur. It does this, however, in a non-legal way (the necessary distinction between morality and legality, missing in *The Struggle for Recognition*, is now present), yet a way that is potentially superior to legal freedom, since we recognise the right of conscience to resist the unjust laws of the state (FR 95–104). Like legal freedom, moral freedom can become pathological, as when one becomes a ‘moral saint’, so obsessed with moral perfection that one disengages from the messy reality of social life, or else one becomes so obsessed with the corruption of social life that one becomes a terrorist (FR 113–20).

Having outlined these conditions of the ‘possibility’ of ‘real’ freedom, Honneth turns to the institutionalisation of social freedom and to the three ‘spheres’ of life in which it must be realised if a society is to count as fully just: personal relations, the economy, and politics.

Personal relations

As noted (p. 248 above), in *Freedom’s Right*, Honneth no longer supports Hegel’s progressive view of history: life is not getting better and better all the

time. And as we shall see, when it comes to the current state of the capitalist market, he is almost anti-Hegelian. With respect to personal relations, however, he does seem to be, on the whole, a Hegelian progressivist: the institutions within which personal relationships occur have become, more and more, institutions that nurture social freedom, warm, safe spaces in which we can relax our defences so that 'our inner nature is set free by mutual confirmation' (FR 132). (Whether an optimistic account of personal relations is consistent with a pessimistic account of economic relations is a question to which I shall return.) The types of personal relationships he discusses are friendship, 'intimate relations', and the family.

Friendship. In the sociological sense, friendship, says Honneth, is an 'institution', albeit an informal one. It might be objected that friends can shape their relationship in any way they want, but the fact that we have an intersubjective distinction between true and false friends shows that this is not the case. In Honneth's narration of its history, friendship was, in the past, almost non-existent. Medieval women, housebound as they were, could not form friendships at all, while among men, friendships generally amounted to networking within systems of patronage and protection. Only in the nineteenth century does the idea of the soulmate appear, the satisfaction of our 'implicit desire to reveal our own feelings and attitudes without reservation'. In friendships between soulmates, the other ceases to be a limit on one's freedom and becomes instead a condition of its possibility. It is true that, under the pressure to economic success, modern friendships, too, are often reduced to networking, but studies show that we continue to censure those who 'instrumentalise' friendship. On the whole, therefore, in spite of the atomising and isolating effect of the capitalist economy, 'there is little reason to doubt the stability of the modern institution of friendship' (FR 139–41).

Some reservations: Honneth admits that friendship was an important part of the good life for Aristotle and the ancient Greeks in general, but for Aristotle, he observes, it was valuable, not for soul-baring, but rather as an adjunct to reflexive freedom, as an occasion for a dialogical examination of one's life goals (FR 139). One might ask, however, why soul-baring, why such a therapeutic model of friendship, should be the preferred model. As Buber emphasises (pp. 149 above), a unique value indeed attaches to friendships that allow for 'mutual unreserve', but in other friendships, delicacy and reserve may co-exist with depth and commitment. I see no clear reason to regard the one form of friendship as superior to the other.

As Honneth himself notes, we actually have very little evidence as to the state of friendship in the Middle Ages. But his claim that, housebound as they were, women had no friends can at best apply to the nobility. The peasant women working together in the fields must surely have developed friendships. On the question of the instrumentalisation of friendship, Honneth claims that while it is common to both the Middle Ages and modernity, in modernity, we

deplore it. Yet surely it would have been deplored in the Middle Ages as well, given that it was the age of Christian love, the age in which the injunction to love one's neighbour as oneself provided the 'moral grammar' of friendship. One needs to compare ideal with ideal: it is illegitimate to set the *ideal* of modern friendship against the *reality* of medieval friendship.

Intimate Relations. Love, as an attachment based only on sexual attraction and affection did not emerge until the end of the eighteenth century, claims Honneth (an extraordinary claim, given that the medieval troubadours pretty much invented the concept of romantic love).¹⁹ Before then, marriage was largely a class-bound economic transaction. The history of sexual love since the eighteenth century is a history of emancipation: the concept of 'perversion' has more or less disappeared; an adult can love another adult of any (or no) gender, and (providing serious bodily harm is not involved) can satisfy whatever bodily needs and tastes that they have. It is true that there are an increasing number of divorces and of single-person households and that modern economic forces make 'emancipated intimate relationships' difficult to maintain, but this is probably just a phase, a 'crisis' we need to pass through as we adjust to the new liberal era (FR 141–54).

One might raise the question of why the liberal, or liberated, love of modernity is a form of social rather than merely negative freedom. Honneth's answer is that the institution of love, like all institutions of personal relationships, is a form of 'self-realisation' (FR 151–2), of, that is, the realisation of the reflexively chosen 'meaning and aims of [our] individual lives' (FR 72). Particularly in the case of sexual minorities, this seems to be sometimes true. The gay art of David Hockney is unimaginable in the age of 'the love that dare not speak its name'. Hockney's mission as an artist and his homosexuality are inseparable. In most cases, however, the claim is very doubtful. Most of the heterosexual majority would surely regard their sexuality as incidental to what gives meaning to their lives, and indeed some of the 'queer' minority as well. Foucault, for instance, in response to the question of whether 'sexuality is central to understanding who we are' says that 'sex is boring' and suggests that 'food and diet' would be a healthier preoccupation.²⁰ The truth seems to be that while in some cases, the free expression of one's sexuality is indeed essential to one's social freedom, in most cases, it represents no more than a negative freedom.

The Family. Since the children of the medieval family had to work, 'there was no "childhood"... nor was there any intimacy in family life' (FR 155). Intimacy in the form of romantic love between the adults, we have already seen Honneth claiming, first arrived in the eighteenth century, but throughout the nineteenth century, the family remained a patriarchal structure in which women obeyed and children were required to be 'disciplined' and 'obedient', seen and not heard. Now, however, the patriarchy has been abolished and children are regarded as autonomous agents so that parents need to substitute negotiation for command. It is true that there is a rising tide of divorce

and a multiplicity of different familial forms—reconstituted families, families with two parents of the same sex, single-parent families, and part-time-parent families—but this is a sign of social freedom rather than social decay. And in fact the disintegration of the traditional family has been exaggerated: in 1995, 80% of German children aged 18 still lived with both biological parents (FR 162). (In 2015, however, in the United States, only 58% of 18-year-olds lived with both biological parents, which suggests a possible trend. This compares with 97% in China, which again raises the issue of Honneth’s Eurocentrism [p. 242 above].) Notice that, as I suggested earlier, with respect to familial and personal relations in general, Honneth seems to be subscribing to actual Hegelian progressivism rather than merely providing the ‘moral grammar’, a ‘normative reconstruction’, of such relations. As he presents them, rewarding personal relations in the Middle Ages were almost non-existent, but, through struggles for recognition and social freedom, have been getting better and better ever since. Given that the rate of suicide among Americans aged between 10 and 24 increased by 60% between 2007 and 2018,²¹ the phrase ‘whistling in the dark’ comes to mind.

The market

When it comes to modern economic relations, the progressivism that characterises Honneth’s account of personal relations abruptly disappears. It would be ‘absurd’, he flatly states, to claim that the neoliberal present is a system of social freedom: absurd to claim that contemporary capitalism is a ‘relational institution’ in which the respective economic roles ‘interweave with each other in a way that would allow subjects to view each other’s freedom as the condition of their own freedom’. It is more plausible to describe neoliberalism as the ‘re-feudalisation’ of fundamental market institutions (FR 176). And so, Honneth asks rhetorically, how can we possibly hope to find a normative reconstruction that would reveal that in its immanent moral grammar (‘inner truth and greatness’), the market is really a sphere of social freedom? *Prima facie*, Honneth’s rhetorical question is an odd one since the whole point of normative reconstructions is to discover an immanent ideal *in spite of* the possibly dire state of current practice. What Honneth is doing here, however, is confronting the Marxist claim that the capitalist system is *essentially* exploitative (FR 180–1): that, even immanently, there is no moral grammar, from which it would follow that the only proper action is to abolish it in favour of a state-controlled economy, as advocated by the student revolutionaries from whom, in his youth, Honneth separated himself (p. 228 above).

Although one senses a certain hesitancy, Honneth rejects the view that capitalism is essentially immoral. There is, he says, a tradition of ‘moral economism’ which includes Hegel, Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Karl Polanyi, Amitai Etzioni, and himself (and also E. P. Thompson), which holds that the

capitalist market *must* be embedded in a system of moral norms for its own good. Although mainstream economists try to detach 'labour power' from the labourer, the separation is impossible. Workers are trained from childhood into a system of moral norms. These make them reliable, conscientious workers. But such norms also give them moral expectations, and if these are not met, the worker will 'no longer be willing to actively participate in the economy'. Productivity will decrease and, in more or less subtle ways, the workers will disrupt, even sabotage, production. It is wrong, therefore, to view the market as, in itself, a 'norm-free system': 'there is an intrinsic connection between ... the market and the norms of the lifeworld' (FR 190–1). (The phrase 'norms of the lifeworld' is taken from Habermas, and Honneth's unspoken purpose is to call to mind and oppose Habermas' view that the capitalist economy is an autonomous system on which lifeworld norms must be *imposed* from without [see GTC I 52–8]).

Honneth acknowledges that while moral economism is one alternative to the prevailing neoliberalism, the abolition of private capitalism in favour of the planned economy of the Marxists is, theoretically, a second alternative. In fact, however, since 'there does not seem to be any practical alternative to the economic system of the market' (FR 196), if the market is to become a sphere of social freedom, we must hope to be able to recover its inner normativity (FR 197–8)—and, of course, take action to recall capitalism to that normativity.

Honneth's attempt to find moral norms intrinsically connected to the capitalist market focuses first on consumption and then on production. I begin with consumption.

The sphere of consumption

Max Weber held the Protestant work ethic responsible for the rise of the capitalist market economy. But while this was important, equally important, says Honneth, was the rise of a culture of consumerism in the eighteenth century, the drive on the part of the bourgeoisie to discover ever more sophisticated tastes that went well beyond basic necessities. Hegel—and given that he is engaged in normative reconstruction, Honneth, too, presumably—viewed late eighteenth-century capitalism as a sphere of social freedom, a system of mutual satisfaction in which the needs of producers and consumers complement each other. Soon, however, the manipulation and manufacture of desires together with the development of conspicuous consumption as a display of social status produce radical inequality between a wealthy few and the impoverished many. Consumer–producer cooperatives developed in the nineteenth century to lower prices, but these have now almost completely disappeared. The 1960s saw radical critiques of consumer culture, and more recently, there have been attempts to buy only ethical products—organic vegetables, free-range eggs, and small, clean cars. These, however, have been the efforts of a small minority;

for the great majority, we are back with SUVs and with teenagers obsessed with 'brands'. Honneth's glum and critical conclusion is that, in the main, the history of consumerism is a history of 'misdevelopment', of a radical falling away from the moral grammar of capitalism (FR 198–223).

The sphere of production

Hegel, as we know, saw the capitalist market as a potential system of social freedom facilitated by mutual recognition. He saw, says Honneth, that mutual recognition is more important in the sphere of work than in the sphere of consumption because, in the modern world, the social esteem one receives is essentially tied to one's work. But, notes Honneth, he was also aware of two potential 'misdevelopments': the impoverishment of workers under the pressure to maximise profits, and the reduction of work to 'mechanical' robotic action unworthy of social esteem (FR 223). (For Adam Smith and Max Weber, the problem with robotic action on the factory assembly line is not the worker's lack of social esteem but rather boredom, 'torpor of mind', as Smith calls it [GTC I 10]. Boredom and lack of esteem are distinct problems: an activity can be high in esteem but low in interest—being a bank manager, for instance—and conversely high in interest but relatively low in social esteem—being an unpublished and unemployed expert on medieval logic, for example. Honneth seems strangely unaware of the boredom problem: the word never appears in his book.)

The impoverishment of the workers was the misdevelopment that reached its peak in the nineteenth century. It was partially dealt with by the gradual introduction of the welfare state, although the negative consequence of that, Honneth believes, was the weakening of collective resistance on the part of the exploited workers. A more successful response to worker-exploitation was the 'organised capitalism' of the 1970s, a system of either *de facto* or *de jure* co-determination by management, on the one hand, and powerful labour unions, on the other. Organised capitalism was, however, destroyed by the destruction of the unions, globalisation, and the neoliberal deregulation of the market. The view of the market as a system for the mutual satisfaction of interests has now disappeared in favour of the view of neoclassical economists that it is an arena for the pursuit of individual advantage by rational agents motivated by self-interest alone (FR 249).

With respect to the misdevelopment of mechanisation, Honneth seems to have nothing to say other than it has become worse than anything Hegel could imagine, particularly on account of the introduction of Taylorism (and Fordism) in the early twentieth century (GTC I 9). From the 1970s, people were encouraged to escape mechanised activity on the factory floor by gaining advanced educational qualifications, but usually this has simply resulted in the replacement of mechanised blue-collar work by mechanised white-collar work (FR 223–53).

Honneth's account of the history of the labour market shows him at his most anti-Hegelian. Its high point for him, the point at which it comes closest to embodying the alleged moral grammar of capitalism, seems to be the co-determination of the era of 'organised capitalism' that was pioneered in Germany, but he seems to have little hope of its return. Moreover even if it did, the boredom side of the problem of mechanised work would remain. Even if machines took over all the drudgery on the factory floor, white-collar drudgery in the office above would be unaffected. And if machines took over office drudgery as well, the problem of boredom would reappear, this time as the 'problem of leisure'.

Politics and the 'we' of democratic will-formation

Democracy, 'democratic will-formation', says Honneth, is necessary to universal social freedom. If sections of society are unable to partake in decision-making, their needs and interests will be ignored. But what is (liberal) democracy? What is real 'democratic life'? For most theorists, says Honneth, it is a matter of there being a state that, in addition to the negative liberal rights, guarantees to all citizens the positive rights of political participation, crucially, the right to vote. But while necessary, the mere aggregation of votes is by no means sufficient for there to be a genuinely democratic society.

As Durkheim and Dewey say, a genuinely democratic state is an 'organ' of democratically formed public opinion (FR 304). This is Dewey's defence of democracy as superior to all other systems of government: government is the attempt to find intelligent solutions to social problems, and the more people who are involved in the formation of those solutions, he thinks, the more intelligent they are likely to be (FR 272).

For public opinion to be formed in a genuinely democratic manner, there must be a 'democratic public sphere' for discussion. The eighteenth century saw two important developments. In France, the bourgeois revolt against monarchical absolutism saw the beginning of the idea that government should be answerable to public opinion, while in the coffee houses and newspaper columns of England and Scotland (Honneth is closely following Habermas at this point [GTC I 46–8]), thoughtful people gathered to find intelligent solutions to social problems. These social institutions were of course the exclusive province of bourgeois men, but at least they established the tacit principle that in order to come to the right conclusion concerning a social problem, on pain of social fragmentation, all interested parties must be included in the discussion on an equal basis. The history of the following 150 years is the history of the gradual realisation of this principle: newspapers appeared addressed specifically to the working classes, men without property gained the right to vote, and then women did as well.

To be set against these promising moves towards genuine democracy, however, is the progressive decay of the public space for democratic will-formation.

As Horkheimer and Adorno showed, already in the 1940s (GTC I 33–7), the media started to deteriorate from being a forum for intelligent discussion to being, in part, an agent of opinion manufacture and manipulation, and, in part, through distracting trivialisation, an agent of depoliticisation, of political apathy. Does the Internet offer more hope for democratic will-formation? Possibly, thinks Honneth, but probably not given that first, there is no demand for rationality in social media, and, second, the centrifugal forces within it (the algorithms that take one to, and only to, the opinions one already agrees with) are clearly leading to further social fragmentation (FR 253–328).

Again then, Honneth's historical tale is bleak, a tale of advancing 'misdevelopment'. In spite of the bleakness, however, an immanent normative ideal emerges: essentially Habermas's notion of the 'communicative rationality' of a genuinely 'deliberative democracy' (GTC I 47–55), though with emphasis on genuine deliberative democracy's dependence on the realisation of social freedom in the sub-political spheres of life.

Nationalism and constitutional patriotism

A state is democratic to the extent it expresses the democratically and reflectively formed will of the people. But who, asks Honneth, are 'the people'? Within the nineteenth-century nation state, two answers emerged. First, the official, political answer: everyone who satisfies the formal criteria of citizenship (residence and birth) belongs to the people. But second, there existed a 'pre-political' conception of the people: the state is the product and possession of a 'nation' or *Volk* 'somehow' defined in either biological or cultural terms. As revealed by the Dreyfus affair, this led to a dangerous form of nationalism that sought to deny civil rights to minorities. Eventually, while France opted for the political conception of the people, Germany, under Hitler, opted for the second and realised its most terrible consequences (FR 264–6).

Immigration to Europe from former colonies that began in the 1950s began to raise the question of whether, in the service of genuine democratic self-determination, states should sever their ties to national cultures. The idea slowly emerged that there needed to be a general 'political culture' different from the cultural background of the majority, which could no longer embrace all citizens (284–9).

The problem, however, is that democratic *will*-formation requires not merely an inclusive public space of undistorted discourse but also a commitment to put its deliverances into practice, a commitment to act for the sake of the general as opposed to merely personal good, to privilege the 'we' over the 'I'. This commitment used to be supported by the pre-political conception of the nation. As the nineteenth century progressed, as women and the working classes were drawn into a national dialogue, people acquired a sense of patriotism, an emotional sense of belonging together within the solidarity of a single

nation (Disraeli's 'one-nation conservatism'). Now, however, in multicultural modernity, we are searching for a more abstract form of interpersonal commitment and solidarity. The view favoured, *inter alios*, by Habermas (GTC I 57) is known as 'constitutional patriotism': the view that we need to cultivate an emotional commitment not to a national culture but rather to the rules and institutions of the democratic state (GTC I 57)—of, Honneth would wish to add, the genuinely, as opposed to merely formally, democratic state.

At the moment, however, says Honneth, this looks like an unlikely alternative to the patriotic nationalism of the past. What persuaded members of the nation state to act for the general good was the sense of a common 'destiny' produced by a collective memory of 'triumphs and defeats'. (This echoes Carl Schmitt's observation that, even in the absence of a common language [as in Switzerland], 'historical fates ... authentic revolutions and victorious wars can ... establish a sense of national belonging' [GTC II 189].) But perhaps, Honneth muses wistfully on the final page of his book, with time and education, such a sense can be developed within the modern multicultural society, with a new telling of history as the struggle for freedom (FR 335), a narrative that will match his own narratives of the struggles for social freedom in the various spheres of social life. (This notion of a new form of *Bildung* echoes Walter Benjamin's call for a new educational narrative that 'brush[es] history against the grain', that replaces the victors' history that is always told by the power-holders with the history of those who have been, for the most part, the losers [GTC II 96].)

Criticism

Since the turn of the century, it has become clear that we live in an age of multiple, and mutually reinforcing crises: global warming, the threat of nuclear warfare, viral pandemics, the collapse of the liberal world order, terrorism, the rise of authoritarianism, the ever-widening gulf between rich and poor, conspiracy-theorising and the collapse of rationality in the realm of social media, the destruction of ethical tradition, the 'woke' fanaticism of impoverished and despairing youth, the isolation of individuals by the fake connectedness of smart phones, and so on. Fromm's 'insane society' (pp. 216–7s above) really is upon us. Yet Honneth's fundamental impulse remains Hegelian: even if the times seem quite dark at the moment, at least the foundations of Western democratic life are in good order so we can reasonably hope for their eventual reanimation. This is a brave position, yet one it is hard to be convinced by. A more natural and, I believe, rational response to the crises of our age is to think that something more radical than tinkering with the details of the liberal-democratic-capitalist complex is required. Critical theory, it seems to me, needs to recapture the *radically* critical stand of its founders, of Horkheimer and Adorno, the 'great refusal' that Marcuse fails to find in Fromm (p. 201 above).

Inevitably, then, while *Freedom's Right* is an important book that makes one think hard about important social issues, the reflections it generates, for me, are of a largely critical character. In what follows, I shall reflect on Honneth's prioritising of freedom, his benign view of the current state of personal relations, his idea of the capitalist market as a sphere of social freedom, his moral economism, and finally, his defence of constitutional patriotism.

The prioritising of freedom

Since the French Revolution, we saw Honneth claiming, there has been only one fundamental Western value: freedom. This claim seems to be false, since, I pointed out, the French Revolution gave equal billing to 'equality' and 'fraternity' (p. 249 above). But Honneth, of course, knows this. I think the claim he really wants to make—expressed elliptically, to get the book off to a dramatic start—is that when one understands what freedom *really* is, one will see that it embraces all the other foundational Western values.

The 'reality' of freedom, we have seen, is 'social freedom'. To be free, in Honneth's fully developed account, is to live in a society in which one's reflectively chosen 'long term' goals have a realistic chance of being realised (pp. 249–50 above). And so his claim must be that that will also be a society in which, *inter alia*, equality and fraternity are also realised.

As Honneth says, his description of a society that realises social freedom for all is a description of the 'moral grammar' 'immanent' in Western democracy. It is a description, that is, of a (much) improved version of our actual modern liberal democracies. 'Equality' will indeed be a feature of this society since, says Honneth, all members of a just society are equally entitled to freedom (FR 16 n 1). But what about 'fraternity', that is, 'solidarity'? And what about the shared communal ethos, the 'thick', meaning-giving values which, I have argued (pp. 245–6 above), that entails? As with *The Struggle for Recognition*, what strikes one once again is how insensible Honneth is to the modernity critique common to almost all the other thinkers who appear in this volume (and its predecessors), the description of Western modernity as a place of isolation and meaninglessness. If there is any validity to such a description, as I have suggested that there is, fraternity and what it presupposes is precisely what is not included in Honneth's completed conception of freedom.

Optimism about personal relations

In contrast to his gloom concerning current economic relations, Honneth, we saw, expresses strong approval for the current state of personal relations (pp. 253–6 above). Leaving aside the question of whether his account of love, friendship, and family life in the Middle Ages is anything more than an old-fashioned Enlightenment (and Hegelian) caricature of the 'Dark Ages', as well as the question of whether he does not skip too lightly over the divorce,

domestic violence, drug addiction, derelict parenting, and loneliness prevalent within modern personal relations, the question I should like to raise here concerns the compatibility of the sunny account of personal relations with the gloomy account of economic relations.

If personal and economic relations were independent and non-communicating spheres of life, there would be no problem of compatibility. But if there is any truth in Marx's thesis that all spheres of culture are a 'superstructure' built on an economic 'infrastructure', they are not independent: gloom about capitalism would merit gloom about personal relations. Honneth is, of course, no Marxist, yet he does see truth in the idea that modern capitalism is 'reshaping ... subjectivity' (FR 154) in that its requirement of flexibility, mobility, and constant availability ('zero-hour' contracts) mean that at least relationships built only on 'infatuation' are liable to be brief (FR 147). Here, however, I think he should have paid more attention to his Frankfurt School predecessor Max Horkheimer, who shows that capitalism shapes subjectivity in a more profound way than this: by propagating the theory that human beings are innately selfish, and by rewarding those who are, capitalism moulds us into precisely those kinds of beings (p. 240 above). If this is true, as I think it is, then Honneth ought to have the same attitude to current personal relations as he has to current economic relations. That he does not shows that, as Nancy Fraser points out with respect to the *Struggle for Recognition* (p. 244 above), he continues not to recognise the foundational role of economics in social life.

Can the market really be a sphere of social freedom?

A just society, we have seen, is one in which everyone possesses social freedom. A maximally just society is one in which social freedom penetrates all the spheres of social life, the personal, the political, and the economic. But is it really possible to show that, essentially and potentially, the capitalist market is a sphere of universal social freedom?

Social freedom depends, we saw, on 'relational institutions', institutions within which one actor's pursuit of their aims not only 'enables' but also 'promotes' the aims of another (pp. 251–2 above). So, for example, a tennis competition 'enables' the satisfaction of my ambition to be a tennis champion but (assuming it to be a fair competition) does not 'promote' it. Clearly, the capitalist market can enable my desire for material well-being, but does it do anything more than a tennis competition to promote my aims?

It is clear that an economic system can be a sphere of social freedom. The medieval village in which one farmer helped another with the harvest and in which eggs were exchanged for milk, was such a system. But can capitalism ever be such a system? If it can, if it has the intrinsic moral grammar Honneth claims for it, then, presumably, before the decline towards the neoliberal economy of the present set in, before the arrival of industrialisation and the Adam

Smith economy, his view must be that capitalism's moral grammar was, at least to some degree, realised. But recall Fromm's (and R. H. Tawney's) account of the birth of capitalism. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, we saw, the non-competitive relations between and within the craft guilds began to break down as some guild members began to accumulate capital, to employ increasing numbers of journeymen, and to lower prices in order to drive competitors out of business and achieve monopolies. Recall Luther's complaint that the monopolists

raise and lower prices as they please and oppress and ruin the small merchants, as the pike the little fishes in the water, just as though they were lords over God's creatures and free from all laws of faith and love.

(pp. 201 above)

If this narrative is correct, then, from the start, it would seem, capitalism was a cutthroat business, a zero-sum game.

But what of Honneth's 'moral economism' (pp. 256–7 above), his view that, contra Habermas, moral norms do not need to be *imposed* on the market from the lifeworld because such norms are 'intrinsic' to it in that it functions less effectively without them?

Honneth says that if the market does not observe lifeworld norms, then 'we can expect not only a disruption of the market mechanism itself but also a subtle or publicly articulated withdrawal of legitimacy on the part of the population', from which it follows that 'the market cannot be understood in Habermas' manner as a "norm-free system"' (p. 257 above). The evidence Honneth produces to show that the market is not a norm-free system consists in a catalogue of nineteenth- and twentieth-century moral criticisms of the market. In the nineteenth century, for instance, he notes, there was a vigorous discussion about what items were legitimate commodities, and vigorous objections to the marketing of alcohol and sexual services (FR 209). The trouble with this kind of evidence, however, is that it pertains only to the 'withdrawal of legitimacy' by critics of the market, whereas only 'disruption of the market mechanism' is relevant to moral economism. That the market is subject to external moral criticism, even that it is viewed with a baleful eye by much of the population, does not at all show that its mechanism is disrupted.

And indeed Honneth's own history of capitalism's decline to the neoliberal present demonstrates that, in its own terms, the market carries on just fine in spite of the critics. The real problem with moral economism is that unfortunately—at least in the Anglosphere—it is empirically refuted. Until the 1970s, with the power of the autoworkers in America and the miners in Britain, it might have seemed to be true. But following the destruction of the trade unions in the Thatcher–Reagan years, serious disruption of production by disaffected workers hardly ever happens. While we are mostly (in Marxist

language) 'alienated' from our work, necessity binds us to it. The carrot may be missing, but the stick drives us onwards.

Sometimes Honneth seems actually to accept this and to abandon his own moral economism. In the discussion of consumerism, for instance, he emphasises the need for, and historical fact of, 'political regulation' (FR 209) of the market to protect powerless consumers from, for instance, price gouging. Here, moral economism is represented as the view that 'the market for consumer goods *can* be understood as an institutionalised relation of mutual recognition, provided that the relationship between sellers and consumers contributes to the complementary realisation of each party's legitimate interests' (FR 208; my emphasis). But this is entirely compatible with Habermas' view of the market as an autonomous system upon which moral norms need to be imposed from without. He, too, would agree that *were* lifeworld norms to be imposed on the market, then it *would be* an institution of 'mutual recognition'. In short, as Honneth sometimes comes close to recognising, his attempt to distinguish his view of the market from Habermas' is a failure.

* * *

Honneth is right about important things. Lack of recognition, 'misrecognition', can cause real harm (although the automatic assimilation of 'harmful speech' to speech that causes real harm needs to be resisted). His and Hegel's argument that the 'reality' of freedom is 'social' freedom seems to me conclusive. What one misses in his work, however, is the radicalism of his Frankfurt School predecessors. The members of the First School were Marxists. Though not Marxists, Habermas and the Second School were left-wing social democrats who called for extensive state control of the capitalist system. With Honneth and the Third School, though the word 'socialism' is preserved, nearly all its substance has been drained away. The history of the Frankfurt School is a history of the progressive dilution of its radicalism, which is, to my mind, a source of regret.

Notes

- 1 See Honneth, Finke, and Osborne (1993).
- 2 Honneth (1991) xiv.
- 3 Taylor (1992) 26.
- 4 Note that the 'remembered words of the parents' should not be identified with Freud's 'superego'. Whereas Freud conceives of the superego as an oppressive force, society's 'garrison set up in an occupied city', Mead and Honneth conceive of internalised social norms as, as it were, rules of the game, rules that offer freedoms as well as constrictions.
- 5 Honneth (2012). This is a set of lectures delivered at Berkeley in 2005.
- 6 Although a Marxist, someone who does not subscribe to the dominant theory is Ernst Bloch. Marx's scorn for the natural rights tradition is, he says, a mistake. Denials of natural rights, offences against human 'dignity', are more potent revolutionary forces than promises of a better future: 'justice' is a more powerful battle cry than 'happiness' (GTC II 62–3).

- 7 Although Honneth does at one point speak of the 'unrestricted' expansion of recognition (SR 171), this is surely a slip. It seems obvious that while *legal* recognition should perhaps be extended to white supremacists, we are not required to 'esteem' them since they do not contribute to social goals and values. We are not required to esteem sociopaths.
- 8 <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2010/05/weird>
- 9 In the Introduction to *Woke, Inc.: Inside Corporate America's Social Justice Scam* (Ramaswamy 2021), Vivek Ramaswamy, a corporate insider, discloses the grounding principle of 'woke capitalism': 'pretend like you care about something other than profit and power, precisely to gain more of each'.
- 10 Honneth and Gonçalves (2013) 214.
- 11 Honneth and Fraser (2003).
- 12 Honneth and Fraser (2003) 34. Historically, of course, both Jewish and Chinese minorities in Western society have tended to succeed economically, in spite of often savage misrecognition.
- 13 See Stone (2017).
- 14 Of course, as already pointed out, even if 'prevailing values' are superior to their Western historical antecedents, it remains an open question as to whether they are superior to non-European alternatives (p. 242 above).
- 15 IM 199. The distinction between 'inner truth' and current manifestation repeats *Being and Time's* distinction between the deep values of 'heritage' and the usually debased version of those values manifested in current practice and opinion (GTC I 149–51).
- 16 The coupling of Sartre and Nozick is odd, since while Nozick sees the freedom to choose our identities as a blessing, Sartre actually views it as a curse since it makes our ultimate choices groundless and hence 'absurd' (see Young [2014] chap. 12).
- 17 See Young (2014) 177.
- 18 Honneth and Willig (2012) 147.
- 19 See Kervan (2021).
- 20 Rabinow (1984) 340.
- 21 *USA Today* September 11, 2020.

Afterword

This, then, is the final volume of *German Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. Together with the sixteen thinkers discussed in the two previous volumes, the eight thinkers appearing here bring the total to twenty-four.¹ Although this is a large number, there remain recognised philosophers whom I do not discuss in any of the three volumes. Analytic philosophy—an increasing presence in Germany largely due to the dominance of the English language—is conspicuous by its absence, as is neo-Kantianism. Despite its early roots in Germany and Austria, analytic philosophy is an essentially Anglophone phenomenon and so its non-appearance in a book about German philosophy should not be a surprise. The non-appearance of the neo-Kantians, however, merits explanation.

Neo-Kantianism was the dominant philosophical orthodoxy in German universities from about 1870 to 1914. For that reason, some of the earlier generation of the thinkers who appear in my trilogy—Gadamer, Heidegger, and Strauss, in particular—had no option but to study with neo-Kantians and hence become apprised of neo-Kantian ideas. But none of them thought of themselves as continuing the neo-Kantian tradition. On the contrary, they rejected it. Though by no means a radical, Gadamer complained of the ‘bloodless academic philosophising’ to which his generation of students were subjected (GTC I 118), and Arendt explains the young Heidegger’s status as the ‘hidden king’ of German philosophy by saying that in contrast to the ‘old opposition between reason and the passions’ perpetuated by the neo-Kantians, in Heidegger, they found ‘a *passionate* thinking, in which thinking and aliveness become one’ (GTC I 131).

What lay behind the charge of ‘bloodlessness’ is the fact that neo-Kantianism is a ‘theoretical’ activity: in his dispute with the neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer at Davos in 1929, speaking for his generation, Heidegger characterised the neo-Kantians as ‘united by the conviction that given the apparent supremacy of the natural sciences, the sole task left for philosophy was to furnish a theoretical groundwork for natural scientific knowledge’.² But in the conditions of radical social collapse that followed Germany’s defeat in the First World War, theoretical philosophy of this kind seemed to miss the point. In times of existential crisis, what is needed is existential philosophy, philosophy which concerns itself with, as Jaspers puts it, ‘what really matters’, namely our individual

and collective lives. For a theoretical philosopher, as for a natural scientist,³ thinking and living are separate acts; for an existential philosopher—who may or may not be an ‘existentialist’ philosopher—thinking and living are, as Arendt puts it, ‘one’. This distinction provides the principle of selection that runs through my trilogy and is the reason I do not discuss the neo-Kantians. All of the thinkers I engage with are, to varying degrees, existential rather than theoretical philosophers. This is not to deny that they are *also* theoretical philosophers. They differ, however, from purely theoretical philosophers in that, to the extent that theory appears, it is harnessed to existential ends.

* * *

A remark about the Jewish contribution to German philosophy: of the twenty-four thinkers discussed in my three volumes, no less than thirteen are Jewish (and Spengler, partially Jewish). The Jewish contribution to twentieth-century German philosophy is extraordinary: when the Nazis excluded the Jews from German cultural life, they excluded them from what was, to a considerable degree, their own creation. Of my thirteen Jewish philosophers, eight (together with the non-Jewish but socialist Paul Tillich) found refuge in the United States, where they remained for some or all of the rest of their careers. My history of twentieth-century German philosophy is thus also the history of a significant part of twentieth-century American philosophy.

* * *

Historians of philosophy like to group philosophers according to intellectual affinities: ‘Platonists’, ‘Aristotelians’, ‘rationalists’, ‘empiricists’, and so on. As it appears in my trilogy, are there such clusters to be found in twentieth-century German philosophy? I think there are. For although my thinkers have widely different interests and commitments and are often at odds with each other, the fact that they all respond to the existential conditions of the times means that a limited number of themes become the focus of their collective concern. Some of these themes are the particular concern of some thinkers, others, of others. The result, I shall suggest, is that most of the figures in my trilogy belong, if not to ‘schools’, at least to groups of relatively like-minded philosophers. All of the themes in question were announced in a lecture, ‘Science as a Vocation’ (GTC I, chap. 1), delivered towards the end of the First World War by Max Weber, a lecture in which he sought to describe the effects of the Enlightenment on modern society.

What the Enlightenment brought to Western society, observes Weber, is ‘rationalisation’, a belief in and commitment to the ‘mastery of all things by calculation’. This is what distinguishes modern from pre-modern society. But while rationalisation has greatly increased our mastery of nature, it has brought with it, argues Weber, four problematic consequences. The first is loss

of freedom: the rationalised rules and procedures of capitalist production are transforming the workplace, indeed life in general, into an 'iron cage'. The second consequence is loss of humanity: as 'cogs' in the industrial and bureaucratic machinery, human beings are being transformed into biological automata. The third consequence is loss of meaning and community: we are becoming not merely cogs, but atomised, lonely, and meaningless cogs. This is because the imperatives of capitalist production are supplanting the norms of ethical tradition that used bind us into community and give meaning to our lives. The fourth consequence is 'disenchantment', loss of the 'magical' and 'mysterious': since science convinces us it can explain everything, we have lost our sense of the holy, of a dimension in which the divine could find a home.

These four, as Habermas calls them, 'pathologies' of modernity are closely interconnected. Concern with one could, and probably should, lead to concern about the others. In fact, however, most of my thinkers focus only on a subset of the four, and it is this that allows for their division into clusters of the like-minded.

Loss of freedom is the central concern of the Marxist, neo-Marxist, and post-Marxist thinkers who appear in my trilogy: of Lukács and Bloch in Eastern Europe, and Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Benjamin, Habermas, and Honneth in (or connected to) Frankfurt. Though not insensible to the other pathologies, the overriding concern of these thinkers is freedom. According to Honneth, indeed (p. 249 above), freedom is the *only* fundamental Western value. For those influenced by Marxism, the overriding theoretical and practical task is the achievement of freedom, freedom from social, economic, cultural, and political oppression.

Loss of humanity, the threatened reduction of human beings to scientific quanta, is the particular concern of humanists such as Dilthey and Gadamer. They do not reject scientific method as such, but wish to restrict its competence to non-human nature. The understanding of human beings is to be achieved not by the methods of natural science, but by the informal procedures employed in everyday life and in the humanities. There is a Kantian aspect to this project: as Kant sought to beat back scientific 'knowledge' to make room for 'faith', so these humanists wish to beat back science to make room for the human spirit. A defence of *Bildung*, the production of excellent human beings through immersion in the canon of the Western humanities, is integral to this project.

Loss of community, of the tradition of shared values that allows for a meaningful life within the bonds of community, is a central concern of communitarian thinkers, such as Arendt, Buber, Stein, Scheler, and Heidegger. It is a concern, too, for Spengler, Schmitt, Fromm, and (at least according to his 'West Coast' interpreters) Leo Strauss (GTC II 196). *Bildung*, immersion of, in Arendt's word, the 'newcomer' (GTC I 225) in the fundamental values of communal tradition is again of vital importance, central to the project of preserving and reviving community.

Finally, ‘disenchantment’, loss of the divine mystery, is the central concern of, as I shall call them, the ‘theists’: Jaspers, Scheler, Stein, Buber, Tillich, and, sotto voce, Heidegger. Even closer to Kant than the humanists, these thinkers really do wish to beat back the bounds of scientific ‘knowledge’ to make room for something that could be called ‘faith’. As we saw in the preceding pages, the theists divide into those who, like Stein and Buber, defend the traditional idea of God as the highest ‘being’, and the ‘death of God’ theists, Scheler (at the end of his career), Heidegger, Jaspers, Tillich, and, in a way, Jonas, who wish to recast God as a teleological process, a ‘volition’ or ‘venture’ immanent in nature as its ground and origin.

As I pointed out in my first volume, Weber’s critique of modernity is a representation of the critique of the Enlightenment initiated by the German Romantics at the end of the eighteenth century: by Goethe, Schiller, Schelling, the Schlegel brothers, and Novalis. Thus Novalis described the bureaucratic-state-capitalist-economy complex as ‘a mill ... without a builder and without a miller, a real *perpetuum mobile*, a mill which grinds itself’, Schelling described it as ‘a machine which ... though built by human beings’ acts ‘according to its own laws as if it existed by itself’, and Schiller speaks of us as reduced to ‘fragments’ of humanity ‘within the monotonous turning of the wheel’ (GTC I 17). In effect, the thinkers I have classified as humanists, communitarians, and theists perpetuate and develop the Romantic critique of the Enlightenment. The Marxists and post-Marxists, on the other hand, remain committed to the Enlightenment, to Habermas’ ‘unfinished project of modernity’. Despite their critique of the current state of the project, they do not wish to abandon it. On the contrary, they wish for more and better rationalisation. This confrontation between the Enlightenment and the counter-Enlightenment is, I think, the central tension in twentieth-century German philosophy.

Notes

- 1 Weber, Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas, Marcuse, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Arendt are discussed in GTC I; Lukács, Bloch, Benjamin, Spengler, Scheler, Schmitt, and Strauss in GTC II.
- 2 Gordon (2010) 139.
- 3 This, of course, is not to deny that natural scientists and purely theoretical philosophers can take stands on political and social issues. But as Weber says, if they do, they do so not as scientists or philosophers but as (often well-informed) citizens (GTC I 22).

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